

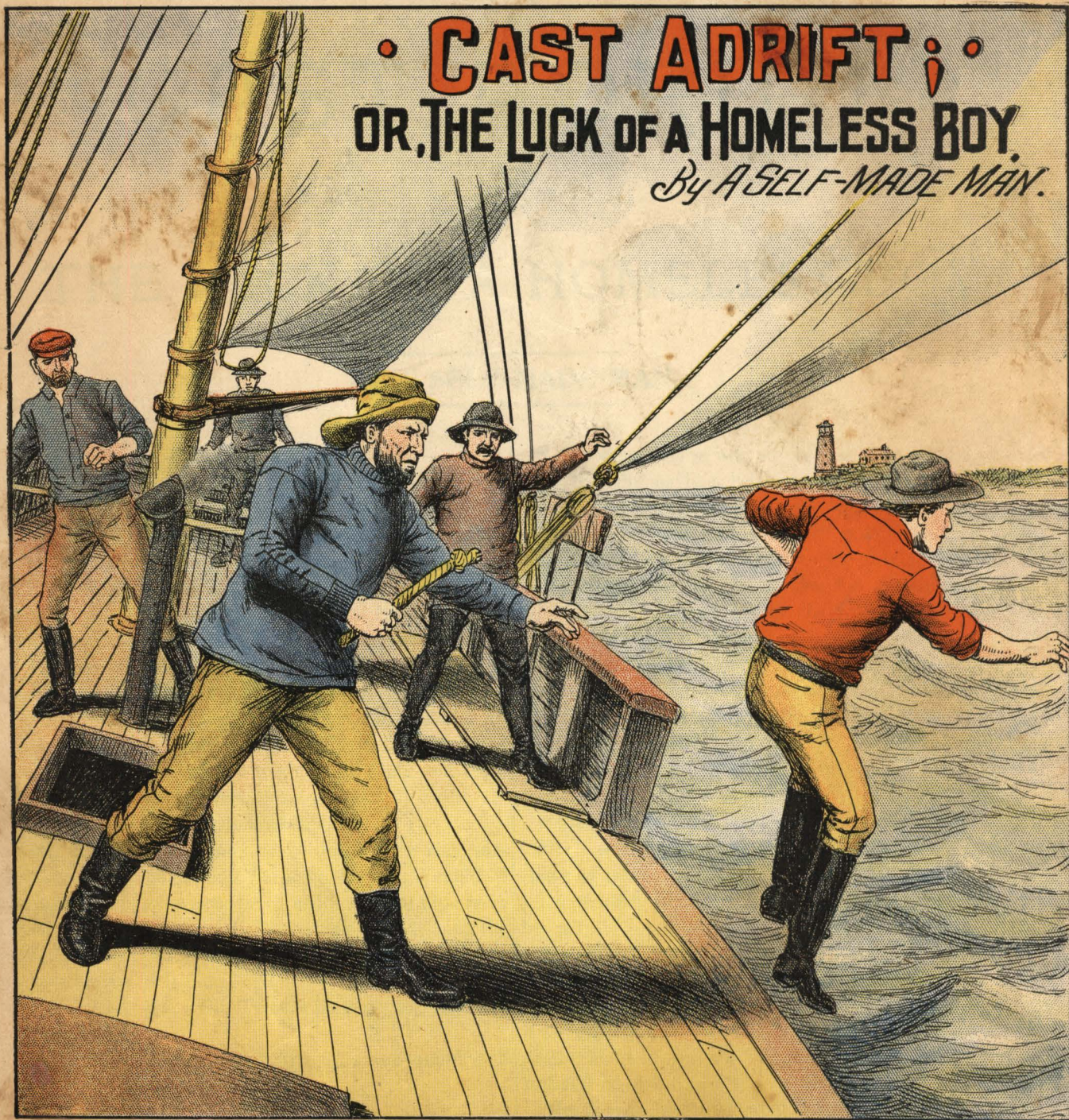
No 81.

5 Cents.

FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

• **CAST ADrift;** •
OR, THE LUCK OF A HOMELESS BOY.
By A SELF-MADE MAN.



"You young cub, I'll tickle your hide in a way you won't like!" roared Captain Barnacle, furiously, as he made a dash for his new hand. Tom Gilbert gave one glance at the irate skipper, and then sprang overboard.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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CAST ADRIFT

OR,

THE LUCK OF A HOMELESS BOY

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

"So ye want the boy kidnapped, do ye, Mister Marsh?" said Captain Barnacle in a fog-horn voice, with a sardonic chuckle. "Well, I'm the man to do the trick for ye if the inducement is sufficient to pay me for the trouble."

"I am willing to pay you well if you will guarantee that Tom Gilbert will never return to Rockhaven," said the other, with a shifting glance at the skipper.

"I can't guarantee no sich thing. I reckon he stands an even chance of gettin' back unless he was to fall overboard some dark night when the sea was runnin' high, and there warn't no life-preserver chucked arter him."

"In that case he'd be lost, wouldn't he?"

"Well, I've know'd sailors to be lost under sich circumstances," replied Captain Barnacle, blowing a cloud of smoke upon the calm afternoon air as he took his pipe from his mouth and pushed the lighted tobacco down into the bowl with one of his calloused thumbs that seemed impervious to all sense of feeling.

"Do you think such a thing would be likely to happen to him if——"

"If what?" asked the skipper, fixing his companion with his eye.

"If he was on deck at the time?"

"It might, if he didn't look out for himself."

"Things fly around on shipboard on dark nights in a gale of wind, don't they? That is, sometimes."

"Not when they're well secured, as they generally are."

"I thought maybe a belaying pin might accidentally hit Tom on the head and knock him overboard."

"Oh, ye thought that, did ye?" said Captain Barnacle, with a hard look at the man who was talking to him.

Mr. Marsh ran his tongue over his dry lips and looked askance at the skipper, but he made no reply.

"Well, if sich a thing happened to him, I reckon he wouldn't get back to Rockhaven, so I s'pose ye hope it will—that is, if the lad goes along with me," said the skipper.

"I said I was willing to pay you well if he never came back to the village."

"How much are ye willin' to pay me?" asked Captain Barnacle, with an interested look.

"Five hundred dollars," answered Mr. Marsh.

"It's worth more," said the skipper, blowing another cloud of tobacco smoke. "Five hundred ain't nothin', for it's a ticklish job carryin' off a stout chap like him ag'in his will."

Mr. Marsh seemed disposed to haggle over the matter, but the captain cut him short.

"I'll do it for a thousand," he said. "Not a cent less, d'ye understand? And ye'll have to make up yer mind pretty sudden, for the Mary Ellen sails at half flood, which'll be eleven to-night by the clock."

Mr. Marsh hesitated, and then, evidently not relishing the terms proposed by Captain Barnacle, he started to argue the matter.

"I ain't got no time for workin' my jaw-tackle to no

purpose, Mr. Marsh," interrupted the skipper, shortly. "Ye know best whether it's worth yer while to pay me what I ask or not. But them are my terms—take 'em, or leave 'em, as ye please," and the captain blew another whiff of smoke, which curled round his head and then floated upward.

The two men stood by themselves in an out-of-the-way spot, strewn with kelp and seaweed deposited there by the high tide, close to the water's edge, at the base of one of the great overhanging cliffs which formed a semi-circular backing to the red-roofed houses that made up the little village of Rockhaven on the coast of Massachusetts.

Captain Barnacle was a square-built, bulky looking man, with deeply bronzed features, a massive jaw and bull-dog type of neck.

His huge hands were seamed and horny, as from hard work and plenty of it.

He was dressed in a suit of shore-going togs that he discarded as soon as his stanch top-sail schooner slipped into blue water.

Everybody in Rockhaven knew the captain, and few, if any, liked his coarse speech and boisterous, uncouth ways.

His business was fishing for mackerel, and he and his crew made a good living, with something to spare out of it.

The skipper and all hands lived in Rockhaven when ashore.

They spent most of their idle time at the "Sheet Anchor," a house of entertainment near the beach that was patronized only by the roughest element of that little community.

James Marsh was a thin, wiry-looking man, with cold, calculating gray eyes that never invited confidence, and thin, closely drawn lips that bespoke a hard, grasping nature.

He was justice of the peace, postmaster and general storekeeper of Rockhaven, but he was by no means a popular personage in the little hamlet.

He lived in the rooms above the store, and the other occupants of the premises were a vinegary old housekeeper and a bright, hardy-looking boy named Tom Gilbert.

Tom helped Mr. Marsh run his store and also attended to such other duties as were required of him.

Everybody in the village liked Tom in about the same proportion that they disliked the storekeeper, and that was a great deal.

Tom's father had been an old friend of Mr. Marsh's when the two lived in the neighboring town of Rossville.

Ten years before the opening of our story the boy lost his mother, and then his father broke up housekeeping, arranged with Mr. Marsh to look after Tom, and went West to try his luck.

He prospered to some extent, and for three years sent regular remittances to Mr. Marsh to pay for his son's support.

Then he contracted pneumonia and died.

He left a will which made the boy the owner of a large plot of land which he had acquired cheap.

James Marsh was named as executor and trustee of this

property, with power to dispose of it at his discretion for the benefit of Tom, to whom he was expected to act as guardian until the boy became of age.

There was a clause to the effect that if Tom died before he reached his majority the land in question was to go to Mr. Marsh.

Marsh, who had moved with Tom to Rockhaven, investigated the property at the time, and learned that it was hardly worth a thousand dollars, and was likely to go a-begging for a purchaser.

As he didn't see much profit in keeping Tom on the old terms, he set him to work in the store to earn his living, which was rather a meager one.

Thus matters went on till a month before the opening of our story, when Tom reached his seventeenth year.

Then one day Mr. Marsh received a letter from the firm he had originally written to about the Western property, making him an offer of \$5,000 for the land.

The advance in value and apparent desire of his correspondent to secure the ground induced the storekeeper to write to other parties for information, and he found out that a land boom was under way that promised to make Tom Gilbert's property worth anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000 inside of a couple of years.

When the storekeeper looked at Tom and noted how healthy he was he decided that there was a poor chance of his succeeding to that property through the death of his ward in the ordinary course of nature.

As he wanted to come into possession himself of land that promised so soon to be immensely valuable, he put his wits to work to devise some scheme by which the boy's span of life could be shortened without actually making himself out a murderer.

He finally hit upon the plan of having Tom carried off to sea by Captain Barnacle of the fishing schooner Mary Ellen.

He knew that the skipper was a thoroughly unscrupulous man, and he thought he couldn't make a bargain with him that would insure the boy's disappearance for good and all.

To accomplish this he was willing to give up \$500, but as we have seen, the rascally skipper wanted \$1,000, and that sum looked so large to Mr. Marsh that he hated to part with it.

When Captain Barnacle finally said that he wouldn't take less, and that his companion could take his choice of stumping up or looking elsewhere for somebody to kidnap the boy, Mr. Marsh reluctantly capitulated.

"I'll pay you \$1,000, then," said he, grudgingly; "but it must be in two payments—\$500 as soon as you have the boy under hatches, and \$500 when you bring me proof of his death."

The skipper shook his head.

"I won't make sich arrangement," he said. "My terms are \$500 down and \$500 if the schooner comes back without him."

"But you might put him ashore, or on board another vessel, merely to gain the second \$500, and after awhile

he'd turn up here again as if nothing had happened to him."

"Ye seem powerfully anxious to get rid of the lad. What's yer object?"

"That's my business," replied the storekeeper, shortly.

"I should think he'd be more useful to ye at the store than out of yer sight," went on the captain, with an inquisitive look.

"That's my business, too," answered Mr. Marsh, ungraciously.

"Well, ye have my terms, and I'll add this to 'em: If the lad should happen to fall overboard, or otherwise put an end to himself, and I bring ye back proof of the same, will ye pay me \$500 more? Will ye give me \$1,500 all together if ye get the assurance that he'll never bother ye ag'in as long as ye live? Will ye?"

It was like drawing a back tooth for Mr. Marsh to say "Yes" to this proposition of the captain's, but he finally did, for he saw no other way of accomplishing his purpose, since there was not another captain who sailed out of Rockhaven that the storekeeper dared to make a similar proposal to.

"It's a bargain, then?" said Captain Barnacle, with an avaricious gleam in his eye.

"It is."

"And when will ye pay me the first \$500? Remember I'll make no move till I have the money counted out in my hand."

"Call at the store in half an hour and you shall have it."

"Now ye are talkin', Mr. Marsh. I shall want to nail the lad soon after dark. Ye must manage to send him down this way on some excuse or another. I'll have a boat here and a couple of my hands with me to pounce on him and carry him aboard the hooker. Mind ye attend to that part of the business, for if I sail without him ye will lose the \$500."

"You'll have no trouble in that respect, for I've found out that every other night after the store is closed he pays a visit to Captain Gibb's cottage half way up this cliff."

"To see the old man's daughter Fannie, I'll wager," chuckled Captain Barnacle. "Nothin' could be better for our purpose. To-night he'll make his last call on the gal, or I'm a flat-headed porpoise. Well, since our business is settled to the satisfaction of both of us, let's be gettin' back to the village, for I'm powerfully dry, and the Sheet Anchor keeps uncommonly good licker."

As Mr. Marsh had no desire to remain longer in that locality, the two rascals left the spot and walked along the beach toward Rockhaven.

CHAPTER II.

ABDUCTED.

While the foregoing conversation, so pregnant with fate for the smartest boy in Rockhaven, was going on, the lad himself was busily engaged in the Marsh store waiting on

half a dozen customers, two of whom were fisherman's daughters who greatly admired the handsome face and sturdy form of Tom Gilbert.

"Well, what can I do for you, Miss Martha?" asked Tom of one of them, a rosy-cheeked, laughing-eyed girl of fifteen.

"A quart of molasses, Tom," she replied. "We're going to have buckwheat cakes for supper to-night, and father likes them well-browned."

Tom took the jug from her and went to the keg to draw the sweet stuff."

"I suppose I'll see you at the singing school to-night, Tom?" said the girl, following the boy into the dark corner where the molasses keg stood.

"I guess you will," answered Tom, cheerfully, as he turned the spigot.

"I'm glad of that, for we couldn't get along without you."

"Why couldn't you? I don't count such an awful lot, do I?"

"You're the best singer in the class."

"Next to you, Martha," laughed the boy.

"No, no. You are the best of all of us," protested Martha Higgins.

"I'm afraid you flatter me."

"No, I don't."

"Say, Martha," said Tom, assuming a solemn countenance, "do you believe in fortune telling?"

"Me? I am sure I don't know," laughed the girl. "Why did you ask me that?"

"There was an old woman—a stranger to this place—in the store a little while ago. I sold her a paper of pins. When I handed them to her she took hold of my hand and looked at it with a great deal of attention. I asked her what she was looking at, and she told me she had a curiosity to see what was the fate of such a bright boy as I. That was a compliment, wasn't it?"

"Well, what did she tell you about your fate?" asked Miss Higgins with a great deal of interest.

"She said that I was on the eve of experiencing a great change."

"A great change! What did she mean?"

"That's what I asked her. She replied that I had a relentless enemy who was conspiring to do me a great harm."

"What a story, Tom. You haven't an enemy in Rockhaven. Everybody thinks well of you. You are the most popular boy in the village. Did she tell you who this enemy was?"

"I asked her that question, and she told me it was one who was very close to me."

"I wonder who she could have meant?"

"That's what beats me."

"What else did she tell you?"

"She said that I was going to leave the village soon."

"Leave this village!" exclaimed the girl. "Have you been thinking of it?"

"Not I. Rockhaven is good enough for me for a little while longer, at any rate."

"Well, go on."

"She said that I was going to cross water to a country new and strange to me."

"My goodness!"

"That I would face many perils and have more than one narrow escape from death within the year."

"She told you that?" said the girl, with some concern.

"She did."

"And do you believe it?"

"I haven't thought anything about the matter since she left the store."

"Was she a gypsy fortune teller?"

"I don't know what she was. She looked like any other old woman of sixty."

"Well," said the girl, "I hope there's nothing in it, Tom, for the village would be dreadfully lonely without you."

"Oh, I ain't the only boy in the place," laughed Tom.

"That doesn't make any difference. We can't spare you."

"I'm glad to find that I am of so much importance, Martha. Still, I can't remain here forever. I've got to go to some big city one of these days to make my way ahead in the world. A fellow can't amount to much in such a place as this unless he becomes a successful fisherman and owns a schooner. Now I don't care about making my living on the water for a copper cent."

"Don't you, really?"

"No," replied Tom, closing the spigot. "I want to do something better than that. I want to make a fortune. By the way, the old woman told me that I was going to become rich. She said I'd come into lots of money before I was a great deal older."

"Did she?" ejaculated the girl, opening her eyes in surprise.

"That's what she did. Now if she hadn't told me that fairy tale I might have placed some confidence in what she told me first; but that settled the whole yarn with me. She was just playing me for a chump."

Tom handed the girl the jug and went to wait on the next customer.

The balmy spring afternoon wore slowly away, but Tom was more or less busy all the time, whether there was a customer in the store or not.

Mr. Marsh came in at about five o'clock and sat down behind the letter boxes to read a Boston weekly which had come that morning.

At six he went upstairs to supper, and when he came down half an hour later Tom was allowed to go up and get his own evening meal.

At eight o'clock the store was closed for the day.

Tom then went to his room, put on his best suit and started for the humble cottage of Captain Gibbs, which was perched, like a bird's nest, on a rugged plateau half way up the side of the great cliff which formed the eastern

boundary of the semicircular depression in the shore occupied by Rockhaven village.

He intended to escort Fanny Gibbs, as usual, to the singing school, the meetings of which were held once a week for about seven months in the year.

It was but a short walk from the store to the foot of the cliff where a rude path upward to the plateau was cut by the hand of time.

The wind, which had gradually risen since sundown, swept through the boy's curly locks as he rapidly strode along the shore.

The moon, rising in the eastern sky, was occasionally obscured by drifting clouds, throwing the face of the cliffs alternately into light and shadow.

It was nearly nine o'clock and there was no thought of danger in his mind as Tom placed his foot on the path that was to take him upward.

Fanny, all unknown to him, was seated on a rock half way down the cliff waiting for him to come after her.

She had not noticed his approach along the shore, for she was gazing out on the wide ocean which laved the rocks below.

This evening she felt singularly depressed, and she could not account for the feeling.

Her thoughts seemed to center round Tom Gilbert, whom in the depths of her heart of hearts she dearly loved.

She and Tom were the closest of friends and the jolliest of comrades.

They were never so happy as when in each other's company.

There was one favorite song, "Robin Adair," that she loved to sing to him, and the words she had improvised to suit herself.

Tom had come to know that Robin Adair was intended for himself.

As the boy started up the path he suddenly came to a full stop, thrilled by the voice of Fanny, which all of a sudden broke out in accents plaintively sweet a little way above him.

"Why are you leaving me, Robin Adair?"

If not deceiving me, why should I care?" etc.

A strange feeling entered Tom's heart as he listened, fascinated, to her song. Leave her!

He had never dreamed of doing so.

What strange connection was there between her song and the words of the old woman who had read his fortune that afternoon in the store?

Was a strange fate pursuing him?

Was he, against his own will, about to be launched upon a life of wild adventure, in which his life would be threatened, far from his native land?

"Always thinking of me, dear little Fanny," he breathed. "I would not have missed this visit to-night for the world."

He would have spoken differently if he had known that

at that moment three forms were creeping upon him in the darkness, for the moon lay just then behind a heavy cloud.

A few moments before Captain Barnacle and two of his sailors had rowed in to the beach from the Mary Ellen.

While one stood in the shadow of the rocks holding the boat by its painter, the skipper and the other, noting the approach of the shadowy form that they knew must be their intended victim, crept forward to intercept him.

They would have missed him, however, but for the fact that Tom stopped to listen to the song.

The nearness of the singer for a moment disconcerted the captain, but he determined to take the boy anyway, in spite of the presence of Captain Gibb's daughter.

As the last words floated down, and the singer became silent, Tom sprang forward to surprise Fanny.

But a huge hand, descending upon his shoulder, detained him.

He turned around and was grabbed by the other arm.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Who are you?"

As he spoke the moon suddenly burst from behind the clouds and sailed into the blue ether.

Its rays fell full upon the group and Tom recognized the swarthy and evil features of the skipper of the Mary Ellen.

"You! Captain Barnacle!" he ejaculated in astonishment.

"Aye, aye! my lad."

"What do you want with me?"

"The schooner is about to put to sea. I am short-handed, so I thought I'd take ye aboard."

"Take me! Why, I am no sailor. Besides, I wouldn't go, anyhow."

"Ye wouldn't, eh?" chuckled the captain, sardonically. "I reckon ye ain't to be consulted. Ye are goin' aboard whether ye want to or not. D'ye understand?"

"No, I don't understand," answered the boy, pluckily. "Take your hands off me. You have no right to tackle me in this way."

"Right or not, we're going to do it. Fetch him along, Flinders."

Fanny had heard the talk below, and when the moon came out saw the actors as they stood at the foot of the path.

She recognized Tom and also Captain Barnacle.

Instinctively she felt that something was wrong, and with bated breath and strained gaze she waited for Tom to break away and come to her.

Instead of which, she saw him being borne, struggling, away toward the water's edge, where a stout boat bobbed up and down on the incoming tide.

"Tom, Tom!" she cried, "what are they doing to you?"

A harsh, triumphant laugh from the lips of the skipper of the Mary Ellen was her only answer.

"Father, father!" she screamed, bounding upward toward the cottage. "They are carrying Tom off. Father! save him!"

Her screams reached the ears of Captain Gibbs, and he rushed hatless outside to see what was the matter; but by that time the boy had been forced into the boat, which was then pushed off and headed for the schooner, riding at anchor half a mile away.

And poor Tom, held down on one of the seats by the burly skipper, saw the girl of his heart kneeling on the rocks, with her arms stretched out to him, and that was the last he saw of her for many a long day.

CHAPTER III.

OVERBOARD.

When the boat arrived alongside of the schooner, Tom was lifted aboard in spite of his resistance.

He was hustled forward and pushed down a short flight of steps into a dimly lighted forecastle, furnished with half a dozen bunks, a small table and a cast-iron stove, the pipe of which pierced the roof.

From a hook driven into the low, grimy ceiling suspended an oil lamp, which shed an uncertain light around.

Abaft of this space was the cook's galley, which in vessels of larger tonnage is always on deck.

It was separated from the main hold by a stout bulkhead.

Tom's hands and legs were bound with bits of rope, and he was tossed into one of the bunks and left there to ruminate on his unfortunate situation.

He could feel the schooner rise and fall with the tide which was coming into the almost-landlocked harbor.

"What can Captain Barnacle mean by treating me in this way?" Tom asked himself, wonder and indignation alike striving for the mastery in his breast. "What use can he make of me—a landsman? How dare he use me in this high-handed manner, anyway? Just wait till I get ashore, and I'll warrant he'll have something to answer for. My guardian, Mr. Marsh, is justice of the peace, and I'll bet he'll make Captain Barnacle sweat for this!"

Poor, unsuspecting Tom!

If he had only known that his guardian was the real cause of all his trouble his wrath would have turned more against him than the skipper of the Mary Ellen, who was merely trying to earn a dishonest penny by the transaction.

But Tom didn't know the real truth, and consequently the vials of his wrath were expended upon the head of the disreputable captain, not but the rascal deserved all the hard thoughts that the boy bestowed upon him at that moment.

"The scoundrel has kidnapped me for some purpose," he mused. "He must be the enemy near at hand the old woman referred to this afternoon. So I suppose I'm to be carried across the ocean to a country strange to me. Yet surely this can hardly be so, since the Mary Ellen is a fishing craft that goes but a hundred miles or so, at the most, off the coast, and is bound to return to Rockhaven inside of a month, according to her luck. Perhaps Captain Barnacle means to make a mackerel fisherman of me,

whether I will or not. He's got such a tough reputation in Rockhaven that I don't wonder he finds it difficult to fill a vacancy in his crew. It is pretty hard luck to be obliged to knuckle down to such a villain as he. Well, it's a long lane that hasn't a turning," concluded Tom, philosophically.

Tom lay and grumbled to himself for a couple of hours, during which time some of the crew came down with small bundles, which they deposited in their bunks and then went on deck again.

At the end of that time preparations began for getting the schooner under weigh.

Her anchor was heaved up, and Tom was soon aware, by the fresh sense of motion, that the craft was on her way to the ocean outside.

In a few minutes she passed the bar and met the incoming rollers with the buoyancy of a duck and was soon in blue water.

Tom was not interfered with during the night and soon fell asleep, lulled to repose by the rhythmical movement of the vessel.

Soon after daylight he was aroused by a rough hand of one of the crew.

"Come now, youngster, tumble up. You've had it easy long enough."

Tom sat up to find his arms and legs free of the ropes.

"Peel off your shore togs and get into these slops," said the same voice, tossing a suit of marine clothing across the boy's knees.

Tom was sensible enough to make the best of a bad job.

He realized that he was at the mercy of Captain Barnacle and his crew, and decided that it would be the part of wisdom to say nothing and saw wood, feeling comforted with the reflection that this could not last forever, and that when the Mary Ellen got back to Rockhaven he would have his innings.

If he could have looked into the future, he would have seen that he was not destined to get square with the skipper and his satellites, but that a greater Power than he had the settlement of their score in His hands.

In ten minutes Tom, in his bare feet, was on deck helping to wash down, and while he was thus engaged Captain Barnacle made his appearance.

His sharp eye piped the boy off, and he watched him like a hawk.

Tom saw him and took care not to relax his industry.

After a while the crew was piped to breakfast, and the boy had to mess with the second section of the crew, as all could not eat at the same time in the small fore-castle.

The schooner was running down the coast within a few miles of the shore.

After breakfast Captain Barnacle came on deck looking rather savage.

Something had gone wrong with him, and he had been hitting his demijohn also with unusual frequency.

The fact of the matter was on recounting the money he

had received from Mr. Marsh he had discovered a counterfeit \$100 bill, and that fact made him mad clean through.

Not being able to get back at the storekeeper right away, he looked around for an excuse to vent his ill humor on the boy he had contracted to do up.

He decided to give him a good licking, to begin with, and after that determined to disclose to him the truth about the kidnapping and turn him adrift ashore to go back to Rockhaven and make matters warm for his faithless guardian.

Before attacking Tom he concluded to put him through a course of sprouts that would tend to make him sick of the sight of a schooner for the rest of his days.

He began operations by ordering the boy to scour one of the anchor flukes.

Although Tom knew that this was a useless piece of work, he got busy with the materials that were furnished him for the purpose.

The skipper stood over him for a while, chuckling at the purposeless job.

Finally he got tired of the fun and fetched the boy a clout alongside the head that felled him to the deck.

"You cantankerous young lubber!" he roared, "can't ye shine her up any better'n that?"

"You don't expect me to put a shine on that thing, do you?" replied Tom, resentfully, for his tingling head pained him considerably.

"How dare ye talk back to me, you whelp? I'll have ye keel-hauled if ye open yer face again to me," and he aimed another vicious blow at the boy.

Tom hopped aside with all the nimbleness of a monkey, and the skipper, losing his balance, fell over the anchor, striking his head against the side of it and drawing blood.

His anger before had only been assumed, but now he was furious in downright earnest.

The liquor also went to his head, and when he scrambled to his feet there was blood in his eye, and these danger signals were not lost on Tom, who hastened to get out of the captain's way.

That, however, was well-nigh impossible for a landsman like Gilbert.

Captain Barnacle looked around for a weapon to use on the boy and spied a thick piece of stiff tarred rope with a heavy knot at the end.

It was a little over a foot long and made a wicked kind of club, all the worse for its elasticity.

"You young cub, I'll tickle your hide in a way you won't like!" roared Captain Barnacle, furiously, as he made a dash for his new hand.

Tom Gilbert gave one glance at the irate skipper and then sprang overboard.

CHAPTER IV.

WRECKED.

When Tom struck the water he went down out of sight, and the schooner sped on its way, soon leaving him far

astern, for the skipper would not haul the vessel into the wind and permit a boat to be lowered to pick the boy up.

He meant to leave him to his fate, determining to abandon his former resolution and earn the thousand dollars that were still in abeyance.

One of the crew, however, had flung a grating overboard, and this floated within the lad's reach when he came to the surface.

He grabbed it at once, and as it was sufficiently buoyant to sustain him he was saved from drowning.

Although the shore was only three miles distant, and there was a projecting point with a light-house that lay less than a mile to the westward, the flow of the tide carried Tom farther and farther away from the coast each moment.

Fortunately, the sea was comparatively calm, while the off-shore breeze was light.

Tom, after several attempts, pulled himself up on to the grating and sat upon it, forcing it an inch or so beneath the surface.

On this wobbling raft, whose center of gravity the boy maintained with some difficulty, he floated out into the broad Atlantic off Massachusetts Bay.

The warm morning sunshine soon dried all of the boy's clothing that was not actually awash, and he felt fairly comfortable, all things considered.

He looked around the horizon for some sign of a vessel by which he might be rescued from his perilous predicament.

To his satisfaction, he saw a sharp-nosed bark bearing down on him under full sail.

She was evidently bound out from Boston.

The vessel came on at a smart pace, and in the course of a quarter of an hour the lookout made out the strange floating object ahead.

The fact was reported to the chief mate, who was in charge of the deck.

He leveled his glass and saw what seemed a boy sticking half out of the water.

He first thought that it was a wooden figure floating out with the tide, but when Gilbert waved his arm vigorously he realized that it was a live human being.

He reported the odd circumstance to the captain, who immediately came on deck, took a squint through the mate's binocular, and then ordered the bark hove to and one of the quarter boats lowered.

Thus Tom Gilbert was saved from a watery grave.

"How came you to be in that predicament, young man?" asked the captain when the boy stepped over the side.

Tom made his explanation and the skipper stared at him.

"So you were kidnapped from your home and jumped overboard to escape a beating, eh? Well, you're in hard luck, surely. We're bound to Carthagea, New Granada, and I can't very well put you ashore, though the coast is hard on our lee quarter. But I'll do the next best thing—I'll put you aboard any fishing craft or inbound vessel we run across," and with that promise Tom was forced to be content.

The watch on deck got Tom to tell them his story, and he had to repeat it to the others later on.

At one bell of the afternoon watch, or half-past twelve, Tom was invited to take dinner with the captain and chief mate.

During the rest of the day the boy eagerly scanned the horizon for a sail, but though many appeared none came near enough to be signalled.

The bark was now out of sight of the coast of the United States, and with night approaching Tom gave up all chance of being transshipped until the next day.

Next day did not better the situation any, in fact it was worse for Tom, because a gale came up and he became ingloriously sea-sick, and remained in that condition three days.

By this time the bark was well on her way toward the West Indies.

When Tom recovered he volunteered to make himself useful during the rest of the voyage, and he also made an arrangement with the captain to work his way back to Boston from Carthagea at the wages of an ordinary seaman.

In due time the bark passed through the Windward Passage between Cuba and the island of Haiti, and headed southward across the Caribbean Sea.

Several days later the lofty summits of the eastern range of the mighty Cordilleras, which sweep around the northern coast of that portion of South America, was sighted.

As the bark drew nearer the coast the scene became more sublime, some of the mountains being of so great a height as to be at all times covered with snow.

The captain expected to make Carthagea next morning, but the weather suddenly came on dirty, and before dark a lively gale was kicking up a heavy sea.

The gale increased with the darkness, and, to make the situation of the vessel all the more perilous, the wind was driving her straight upon the coast.

Tom, not being a sailor, did not at first appreciate the gravity of their peril, though he was sufficiently alarmed by the fierceness of the storm and the darkness of the night.

Life lines had been run fore and aft to give the officers and crew something to hold on to, lest they be swept overboard by the heavy seas that deluged the deck every few moments.

All hands were wet through, though the warmth of that region mitigated some of the usual discomforts of the drenching.

"This is pretty fierce," remarked Tom, as he hung on to one of the lines under the lee of the cabin, to Bob Lawrence, one of the younger seamen, a mere lad, with whom he had struck up a friendship.

"It's fierce enough, though the bark rides it like a duck, but it isn't a circumstance to what we're facing."

"What is that?" asked Tom.

"A lee shore."

"I thought the captain was working off the coast."

"We've been trying to, but it's no use. The wind is dead

on shore, and unless it shifts around to another quarter this bark is liable to rest her keel on something more solid than water before morning."

"Do you mean that we're likely to go ashore?" asked Tom, aghast.

"That's just what I do mean," replied Bob, solemnly.

"And all hands may be lost?"

"I'm afraid that few of us will escape if the bark strikes."

"As I'm the most useless person aboard this vessel the chances are that I'll be a sure victim," replied Tom, gloomily.

"It doesn't follow. You stand as much show as any of us if the bark is wrecked, for then seamanship won't avail a chap much. It will be luck more than anything else."

"Luck!" ejaculated Tom. "I've had pretty hard luck in the last ten days."

"I don't know about that. You were mighty fortunate to be picked up by us from that floating grating. Supposing it had been night that you went overboard from that fishing schooner, or supposing there had been a sea running at the time, where would you have been?"

"I'd have been at the bottom of the Atlantic, I guess," admitted Tom.

"That's right; you'd have been lost. When a fellow is born to be hanged he can't very well be drowned—not that I wish to infer that you were born to be suspended," chuckled Bob.

At that moment a huge sea came aboard that nearly took them off their feet.

"If you'd let go your hold that time, Tom, you'd have gone overboard, and that would have been the last of you," said Bob.

"I know it; that's why I held on for all I was worth, though it nearly took the arms out of me."

This conversation was carried on with considerable difficulty, for the roar of the storm was something deafening.

The boys, however, were sheltered to some extent and fared better than other members of the crew in more exposed positions.

The vessel continued to drive on to her doom, and everybody was agreed that nothing but a change in the direction of the wind would save her.

No change came as the precious moments flew by, though the captain believed that the worst of the gale had spent itself.

The sea, running to a terrifying height in Tom's eyes, was bearing the bark on to an inhospitable and deserted part of the New Granada coast.

She was like a shuttlecock in their grasp.

It was four in the morning when the vessel struck on a series of outlying rocks, was lifted up bodily by the inrushing sea, and then settled back with a crash that broke her back amidships.

The forepart of the vessel, with nearly all the crew, dis-

appeared in the waves, while the after section, largely composed of the cabin, was jammed in between the jaws of two enormous rocks.

CHAPTER V.

STRANDED.

The shock of the impact of the bark upon the rocks flung Tom Gilbert and Bob Lawrence against the cabin door, which, giving way under their combined weight, sent them sprawling upon the tilted floor of the narrow corridor off which opened the steward's pantry and quarters, on one side, and the carpenter's berth and dunnage room on the other.

That saved their lives.

A deluge of water had followed Tom and Bob into the passage, and they scrambled to their feet half suffocated by the yeasty foam and green sea, which, however, retired as quickly as it had come.

"Are we really alive?" ejaculated Tom, with a gasp, grabbing his companion in the darkness.

"I'll swear I am," replied Bob, with a nervous laugh.

"Where are we, anyway?"

"We're on the vessel yet, but she's hard and fast ashore."

"I thought she went to pieces under us in that awful crash."

"I thought so, too, when the water closed over our heads; but I felt the planks under my feet, and then I knew we still had another chance for our lives."

"Are we in the hold?"

"No. How could we be? All the hatches were battened down. We're in the cabin passage. Stretch out your arms and you'll feel the sides of it."

Tom did so.

"That's right," he replied. "We must be ashore, for I don't feel any motion."

Another wave, not so heavy as the other, dashed in at the open doorway and covered their shoe tops.

The roar of the storm still continued, though with diminished force, and as the moments flew by, and the boys felt that their retreat seemed to be too solid to give way under the buffetings of the waves, they took courage.

"We seem to be fairly safe for the present," remarked Tom, at length. "The waves only come from the front, where the door is. The bark seems to have gone on shore by the stern."

"That's evident, for this part of the vessel is pointing upward and fixed, and all forward looks to be under water. It's my opinion we're wedged in among some rocks. When day breaks we'll be able to make out just what our position is. I'm afraid most of the people aboard have been drowned. I haven't heard a sound from a human being since the crash."

"Nor I."

"It would be tough if we were the only ones saved," said Bob.

"It would that. It doesn't seem to blow as hard as it did.

"The gale is going down. It will probably be all gone by the morning."

"I hope so."

The water did not come into the passage any more, though the boys could hear it beating and splashing outside.

"Let's go into the cabin and see if we can strike a light," suggested Bob.

They easily made their way there.

All was dark and silent, save for the muffled noise made by the gale without.

Bob hunted around for matches, but couldn't find any.

"Let's take off our wet clothes and get into the mates' bunks," he said. "We are safe enough here, I'll warrant. I'll take the first mate's stateroom on this side, and you can occupy the second mate's on the other side. I'm ready to drop from fatigue and the knocking about I've received."

"Same here," replied Tom.

Accordingly they took off their soaked clothes, got into the bunks and covered themselves up.

Inside of five minutes they felt so comfortable that before they knew it they were both fast asleep.

While they slumbered day broke, the gale subsided to a fair breeze, and the sun arose in a cloudless sky.

It was many hours before either opened his eyes.

Tom was the first to do so, and he was astonished and bewildered to find himself where he was.

He looked around the small stateroom and out through the open door into the cabin, which was brightly illuminated by the rays of the sun shining down through the skylight.

He thought he must be dreaming until the fearful events of the night came crowding upon his recollection.

Then he sat up and finally jumped out, all naked as he was, onto the floor.

His clothes were strewn upon the deck where he had hastily cast them in the darkness.

They were still soaking wet and in no shape to put them on, so he wrapped a blanket around him and marched into the cabin.

At that moment Bob woke up and saw him through the open doorway of his stateroom.

"Hello, Tom!" he cried. "How's things?"

"Blessed if I know. I've just tumbled out of my bunk. My clothes are too damp to put on."

Bob grabbed a blanket and joined him.

"Not a soul around. I'll bet we're the only ones on the wreck. Let's look outside."

They climbed up on the quarter-deck by the brass-bound stairs in front of the binnacle and looked around.

"Gee whiz!" ejaculated Tom. "Everything is gone but the cabin part of the bark, and that's stuck into a hole in the rocks. I wonder if this is part of the shore, or some distance from it?"

"I give it up," replied Bob, "but we'll find out by and by in climbing to the top of these rocks. The storm is

gone, as I said it would, but the sea is still tumbling about below. We'd better bring our clothes up and dry them on the skylight. While the sun is doing its duty we'll take a look into the pantry and see what we can find to eat. I don't know how you feel, but I'm mighty hungry."

"So am I," replied Tom.

They brought their clothes up and spread them about to dry, and then started for the pantry.

There they found plenty of stuff to eat, including a breaker of water nearly full.

After spending half an hour below they returned to the quarter-deck.

Their clothes were getting on nicely.

"Turn them over," said Bob, "and that will help the good work along."

In an hour, during which they discussed the situation, they found that their clothes were quite dry, and they put them on.

"Now let's see where we are, and what the prospect is of getting away," said Bob, leading the way up the rocks.

Tom followed and they soon reached a point from which they got a good view of the shore.

The line of black, ugly looking rocks on which the bark had struck was seen to be a part of the coast, with a beach extending away in either direction.

"We're a pair of Robinson Crusoes," said Bob. "There's not a house or human being in sight, and we may be fifty miles from any for all we know."

"Is this part of New Granada?" asked Tom.

"I guess it must be, for we were off that coast when the gale came upon us so suddenly."

"Isn't the shore inhabited?" asked Tom, whose knowledge of the coast of South America was exceedingly limited.

"I've heard that the whole region of New Granada bordering on the coast is inhabited by a savage tribe of Indians called the Goahiras, and I'm afraid that's true, though, of course, I can't swear to it, as I never was here before."

"Gee! I hope that we won't meet any of them on our way to civilization," said Tom, apprehensively, "for if we did, and they're hostile, our names would be mud, for fair. I dare say they'd kill and scalp us."

"They might kill us, it is true, but whether they're given to scalping or not I can't say."

"It wouldn't make much difference to us after we were dead."

"Don't talk about being dead," replied Bob. "It's bad enough to recall the fate of the officers and crew without going any further. We ought to consider ourselves uncommonly lucky. Look at these rocks all around here. Just see what a remarkable escape we've had. It was one chance in a thousand that this part of the vessel was cast up into this hole. Had she struck anywhere else there wouldn't have been a plank left of us, and we should have been food for the fishes with the rest of the people, who were probably washed overboard when she struck."

"It does seem funny that the bark should have been flung in here," admitted Tom. "Looks just as if it was done on purpose. I hope our luck will continue. That we'll soon find some of the respectable inhabitants of the country who will direct us to a town."

"The worst of it is that neither of us can speak the language of the country," said Bob.

"Oh, we can make signs. They'll understand that we're shipwrecked Americans."

"That's what we'll have to do. We'll have to shift the best way we can."

"Shall we make a start right away?" asked Tom.

"No, we'd better wait till to-morrow, for it must be noon now. We must make up a couple of bundles of provisions, for we can't tell how far we may have to walk before we run across an inhabited spot. You see, we don't know where we are on the coast. We may be a mile or two from a town or village, or we may be fifty miles. It won't do to take any more chances than we can help."

Soon afterward they returned to the quarter-deck of the bark, and thence made their way to the pantry again, where they broke open a tin of potted meat, and with crackers and a can of preserved peaches enjoyed a capital meal under the circumstances.

Bob then proposed to ransack the staterooms, especially the captain's, for what might be of use to them.

The discovery that gave them great satisfaction, for they felt that they stood in need of protection from the possible appearance of Indians, was the finding of a couple of first-class Remington rifles, with plenty of ammunition.

They also found three revolvers and several boxes of cartridges.

They busied themselves for the greater part of the afternoon making up small packages of canned goods, crackers, etc., to take with them next morning.

What with the rifles, ammunition and stores, they found they had a pretty big load apiece, and even at that they saw they would have to abandon much that they wished to carry.

"We'll start soon after sunrise," said Bob, as they sat at their ease on the quarter-deck.

"Which direction shall we take?" asked Tom.

"To the west, of course, for Carthage lies in that direction."

"I hope it isn't far off. Hello, what's that?" ejaculated Tom, suddenly, pointing to an object floating in toward the rocks. "Blessed if it don't look like a boat!"

"It is a boat," cried Bob, springing to his feet.

CHAPTER VI.

AFLOAT.

The two boys watched the boat as it slowly floated toward the wreck of the bark.

"That boat is going to prove a big piece of luck for us," said Bob.

"How is that?" asked Tom.

"Why, instead of walking along the shore to Carthage, or the nearest town, and weighing ourselves down with a load of packages that will grow heavier with every mile, we'll be able to go by boat and carry several times as much provisions and the whole breaker of water whose conveyance has puzzled us so much."

"That will be fine," exclaimed Tom, seeing the great advantage the boat was bound to prove to them.

"Besides, we'll be able to keep away from any stray Indians that we might run across by land."

"That's better still," said Tom.

"Then, again, we'll not be so likely to go astray and get lost," added Bob. "By keeping along the coast we're bound to hit a port some time."

"So we are," agreed Tom.

"As it is awful hot during the greater part of the day in this latitude, we can do most of our rowing at night, and haul up in some creek or along the shore wherever we can find shelter, when the sun begins to get in its fine work. Now if we had to follow that plan in walking we should be apt to get all mixed up in the dark. We'll put the bark's compass in the boat, which will be a better guide for us than the sun. So you see, Tom, taking everything into consideration, this boat will be a Godsend to us."

"You can just bet it will," replied Tom, enthusiastically.

Bob crept down the rocks until he reached a point where he could capture the boat when it came within reach.

The only thing that troubled him was that there might be no oars in it, and that they would have to depend on pieces of wood torn from the bark.

His misgivings in this respect proved to be unfounded.

Two pair of oars were tied along the seats, from which circumstance he recognized the little craft as having belonged to the bark.

In a few minutes the boat floated in close enough for Bob to grab it.

The painter was dragging alongside and the craft was half full of water.

"Get something out of the steward's room to bale her out," Bob called to his companion.

Tom didn't need to be told twice, and soon came down the rocks with a dipper in his hand.

Between them they soon got the water out of the boat.

"We won't start now till along toward sundown," said Bob, as he secured the painter around one of the rocks.

"That suits me," replied Tom. "But we want to load the boat now so as to have all in readiness to be off."

They spent an hour putting all their packages into the little craft, together with several additional boxes of canned stuff, the bark's compass, the breaker of water, a long coil of line, and other odds and ends they figured that they might find use for during their trip.

"Here are a couple of good fish lines I found in a locker in the chief mate's stateroom," said Tom, exhibiting them.

"They'll prove useful, I'll bet, in providing us with a

mess of fish," said Bob. "You can stow them in the compartment under the bows."

"I've got another suggestion," said Tom.

"What is it?"

"That we rig a small mast with a cross-piece to carry a sail. Then when we have a breeze we won't have to fatigue ourselves with rowing. Besides, we'll need something to shelter us from the sun, anyway, when we are asleep, for we can't count on finding a shady spot always when we want it."

"That's a good plan. I expected to carry a piece of sail-cloth along—there is a lot of spare canvas in the lazaretto under the cabin—but I didn't think about rigging up a mast. We'll look around and see if we can find a suitable piece of wood to answer the purpose, which we can lash to the center seat and to the narrow plank that runs fore and aft in the bottom of the boat."

A search soon proved that they were up against a problem that was not as easily solved as proposed.

There was nothing about the wreck that would in the slightest way answer the purpose, and they had no tools with which to shape a bit of wood.

"Let's take a look along the rocks and see if any of the bark's spars have washed up," suggested Tom, at last.

Bob agreed that a short search might prove profitable, and so the boys started in opposite directions to look for a small spar or something else that might fill the bill.

Tom was fortunate enough to find a broken piece of the bark's spanker gaff.

He towed it around to the wreck.

When Bob returned from an unsuccessful quest he showed it to him.

"That will be just the thing," said Bob. "I'll get a block out of the lazaretto and attach it to the top of this spar and reeve a line through it. A piece of wood a yard and a half long will answer for a yard to tie one end of the sail to. We'll hook the block to it and thus be able to raise or lower the sail at a moment's notice. We'll have a bang-up little sailboat when we get everything ship-shape."

After lifting the broken gaff into the boat they knocked off work for a while, as the heat of the sun was too much for further exertion.

"Better take a short snooze in the cabin," said Tom, "for it's too plaguey hot to lounge around even doing nothing."

Bob agreed that it was an excellent idea, and so they turned in on the mates' bunks and soon fell asleep.

Tom woke at three o'clock and aroused his companion.

"Don't you feel like eating something?" he asked him.

"I think I could stand something in that line," replied Bob with a grin.

So they adjourned to the pantry and made a meal off of canned goods, washed down with water diluted with claret.

Feeling much refreshed, they decided to begin rigging their mast and sail.

This work fell mainly to Bob, who, being a practical sailor, best knew how to manage the matter.

In due time it was completed to the satisfaction of both.

"That's all to the good," cried Tom, enthusiastically. "They say necessity is the mother of invention, and I guess we've proved the truth of it."

"That sail will carry the boat along in a fresh breeze like a duck," said Bob, admiring his own handiwork with great satisfaction.

"That's right, and save us a lot of hard work. I'm beginning to take a great interest in this coasting trip that's ahead of us," said Tom.

"I hope it will prove as interesting as you are looking for, but I have some doubts about it."

"What doubts have you got?"

"Well, we can't tell now what we may run up against before we reach Carthage. I don't know anything about the coast of South America. Neither do you. There may be lots of perils lying in wait for us between this place and our destination. The Indians may get us, for one thing, if they have boats to put out after us."

"Gee! I hope not. Perhaps we'd better keep well out, as long as the weather holds fair, and not land anywhere along the shore. We can stand alternate watch, one steering while the other sleeps."

"As long as there's a breeze the Indians never would be able to overtake us. However, I think your suggestion a good one about sticking to the boat. Even if we laid up anywhere along shore we'd have to stand watch, for fear of trouble coming on us unawares."

At sundown everything was in shape to begin the trip, so they decided to start without delay.

They ate their supper aboard the wreck, and then conveyed the balance of the provisions aboard the boat, together with several bottles of claret and one of French brandy.

"The Indians, or any one else, are welcome to what they find on the wreck," said Bob, as he tossed a light bundle on top of a pile of canned goods in the bow of the boat.

"What's that you've brought down?" asked Tom, regarding the bundle with some curiosity.

"That," laughed Bob, "is something we shall stand in need of if we should meet with some of the winged inhabitants of the country."

"I don't know what you mean?" replied Tom, rather mystified.

"I found that in the cap'n's stateroom. It's mosquito netting."

"Are there mosquitoes here?"

"Are there? I heard the second mate say that they swarm about all the rivers and such places. He said they could give New Jersey skeeters cards and spades and beat 'em to a standstill."

Thus speaking Bob shoved off and seated himself at the rudder, while Tom hoisted the sail and trimmed it to the light breeze.

The boat shot away from the wreck and headed westward along the coast.

CHAPTER VII.

ASTRAY.

After passing the line of rocks on which the bark had been wrecked, they found the shore more or less covered with trees and wild vegetation of a brilliant character.

They kept about a quarter of a mile out, the boat skimming along at a satisfactory rate.

With the setting of the sun night came on with a suddenness that might be compared with the gradually snuffing out of a candle, for there is no twilight in the tropics.

The sky, however, was brilliant with stars, which fact relieved the darkness to a considerable extent.

The boys enjoyed the beginning of their trip immensely.

It was a sort of picnic to them, but there were stern realities ahead of them that they dreamed not of.

They decided on an alternate watch of two hours each, and cast lots to see which should stand the first one.

It fell to Tom, and soon afterward Bob curled upon on the seats, with the soft mosquito netting for a pillow, and was presently fast asleep.

As the first watch began at eight, Tom awoke his companion at ten and was himself aroused at midnight.

"The wind has come up pretty fresh," said Bob, "and there's a haze creeping up from the seaward. I should think it might blow harder before your watch is out. If necessary you can take a reef in the sail by lowering it to suit. It may also be well to steer closer inshore, so that we could beach the boat quickly if a heavy squall should come on with the customary suddenness of such blows in these waters. I give you these points because you're not much of a sailor. If things should look skittish call me at once."

"All right," responded Tom, and Bob turned in on the seats again.

The wind gradually increased and the water roughened a good bit, so that ere long Tom concluded to follow Bob's advice and get nearer to the shore, which before dark had presented the appearance of one long beach.

At two o'clock, when Bob came on duty once more, the boat was jumping along under reduced canvas.

When the small clock they had brought along indicated four Bob decided not to arouse Tom, for the weather looked nasty enough to require an experienced hand at the helm.

He was running the boat close in shore, which now appeared to be fringed with a dense line of trees, or what Bob took to be trees.

The surf, too, was piling up on the beach in a way that promised an unsatisfactory landing if he considered it necessary to attempt it.

At half-past four Bob, without knowing it, for he was following the coast line as his guide, steered into one of the three mouths of the river Magdalena, which is second only in size to the Amazon and Orinoco on that part of the continent.

There was some sea on the bar, and the first intimation

the young steersman got of it was when the boat rose suddenly, like one of the Coney Island flatboats when it strikes the foot of the inclined chutes, and for a moment he thought their little craft was going to capsize.

But it didn't.

The boat continued on as before, leaving Bob to wonder what he had been up against, for he never dreamed of such a thing as passing a bar.

Although the wind blew just as hard as ever, it wasn't so perceptible as the boat sailed farther away from the sea.

Bob thought it was going down, and at five called Tom to relieve him.

Tom, of course, supposed they were still sailing along the coast, and was amazed to find when the sun came up and day broke with its customary suddenness in that latitude, that the boat was sailing across what appeared to be a good-sized lake.

As a matter of fact, it was the first of many lakes which are formed by the waters of the Magdalena River before it empties into the Caribbean Sea.

He hurriedly aroused his companion.

"Say, old man," he asked in a perplexed tone, "where have we got to anyway? This isn't the seacoast by a long chalk."

"Why, no," replied Bob, equally mystified, "this looks like a lake."

"That's what it is," nodded Tom. "We sailed into it during the night. I suppose we'd better turn around and sail out again."

They were skimming along close to the eastern shore which was fringed with a broad belt of mangrove trees standing on numberless branching roots which extended far into the water.

So dense and tall were these trees that the view beyond them was completely shut out.

"We'll douse the sail and have breakfast first," replied Bob.

The weather was fine again, and the wind dropped quickly to a soft breeze while they were disposing of their morning meal.

The tide was flowing up the river and the boat was borne further and further up the lake.

"I'm afraid we shan't have the breeze with us much longer," said Bob, when they had finished breakfast. "In which case I don't think it will pay to pull all the way back to the coast under the broiling sun. It looks as if we'll have to remain here for the better part of the day."

"Well, it's a good thing we came by boat, for had we walked, as we expected to have to do, how the deuce should we ever have been able to cross this lake, which seems to be the continuation of another body of water above?"

"You've got me, Tom. We'd have been in a bad hole."

"I should say we would. This isn't going to be such a pleasure jaunt as I fancied it would be. I'd like to know where we are, anyway. It appears to be a wild and uninhabited region."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the morning air echoed with the crack of a rifle.

"Hello! Are the Indians shooting at us," added Tom, with something like a gasp, for the unexpectedness of the shot quite took away their breaths.

They both looked in the direction of the sound, and saw a white man, in modern garments, suddenly appear on a point of the shore and gaze at them.

He waved his arms with the gun above his head to attract their attention.

They also heard a faint "halloa!"

"I believe he's calling to us," said Tom. "He isn't an Indian, I'll swear. Shall we head in shore?"

"Yes," replied Bob.

"He must live in this neighborhood, and will be able to post us as to our whereabouts. That shout seemed more like English than Spanish or Portuguese. I hope he'll prove to be a friend in need."

By this time the wind had died completely away, so they pulled down the sail about half way, tied the yard in that position to the mast and then stretched the canvas over the rear half of the boat as an awning, attaching the end to two pieces of wood they had nailed on either side of the rudder for the purpose.

Then they got out the oars and pulled toward the spit of land on which the stranger stood, waiting for them.

He was a stalwart man of fine physique, clad in a suit of soiled duck, with a broad-brimmed straw hat on his head.

His face, which was a pleasant one, stamped with frankness and honesty, was sunburned to the color of mahogany.

The rifle he held in his hand was a modern repeating weapon, and the butt of a heavy revolver stuck out of a kind of hunting-belt.

He stood leaning on the gun while he watched the approach of the boat, and the boys, as they plied their oars, wondered who he was, and where he lived, for there were no signs of civilization in that neighborhood as far as they could see.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ODD MEETING.

The stranger addressed them in Spanish as they got close in to the shelving piece of shore.

As they did not understand a word he said they could not answer him.

Tom, however, turned around and shook his head.

"We're Americans," he said, "can't you talk English?"

"Of course I can," said the stranger, heartily, while a pleased smile came over his countenance. "I'm an American myself; but I did not dream of meeting a couple of my countrymen, and boys at that, here on the banks of the Magdalena."

"Is this called Magdalena Lake?"

"Magdalena Lake! No; its Magdalena River, one of

the longest in South America. Didn't you know that?" in some surprise, as he stepped down to the edge of the water.

"No. We know very little more than that we believe this is the coast of New Granada, replied Tom, "and that we expect to find the port of Carthagena somewhere along the coast."

"Carthagena is about seventy-five miles from here as the crow flies, and probably fifty more by water. How is it you are here in that boat, which seems to be stocked for an exploring trip, and yet you do not know that this is the Magdalena River?"

"That's easily explained," answered Tom. "We are the only survivors of the American bark Albatross, Captain Seymour, bound from Boston to Carthagena, which was wrecked on the rocks three nights ago at some point along the coast to the eastward. The vessel was driven stern on into a hole in the rocks, and went to pieces except the cabin section, where we were thrown by the shock. The officers and crew must have been lost overboard, for not a sign of one of them did we see in the morning, nor up to the moment we left the wreck last night just before sundown. We expected to follow the coast westward, but somehow in the darkness we sailed in here, and so here we are."

"Well, it's mighty lucky for me that you came in here," said the stranger.

"How's that?" asked Tom.

"I came down the river in my boat, looking for deer——" began the man.

"Deer!" exclaimed Tom, in wonder. "Do you mean to say there's deer here?"

"Yes, lots of them. There are also jaguars and boa constrictors, not to speak of sharks and alligators in the water."

"I don't fancy those things for a cent," said Tom.

"You are not the only one that objects to their presence, young man. As I was saying, I came down the river before daylight this morning to shoot a deer or two, for my family and helpers would welcome a dish of fresh venison. Unfortunately my boat ran on a sharp rock not far from here, pitching me into the water and sinking immediately. I swam ashore with my rifle, counting myself lucky to escape the jaws of an alligator. It was clear to me that I would have to make my way home by land, by a hazardous and roundabout course, which would expose me to capture by some stray band of Goahiras, or to the attack of a jaguar or an anaconda at some unguarded moment. While I was considering the perils of my position I caught sight of you and your boat. Your appearance was a god-send to me, and I instantly discharged my rifle to attract your attention, and then ran down here and showed myself."

"Then, I suppose you wish us to take you aboard and carry you home?" said Tom.

"I should consider it a Christian act as well as a great favor," replied the stranger.

"Well, you can count on us to do the best we can for you, sir," replied Gilbert, cheerfully. "We wouldn't be such savages as to refuse to help you out of your trouble. How far up the river do you live?"

"About eight miles. Let me introduce myself. My name is John Sterling. I was born in Brattleboro, Vermont. I came to South America something like eighteen years ago. I took a fancy to the wilds of New Granada, and went to work for an American who had married the daughter of a Spanish hidalgo, and had settled out here near the banks of the Magdalena. I fell in love with his only daughter and married her. A few years since my father-in-law moved with the rest of his family to Carthagená, leaving me in full possession of his property, which now belongs to my wife. Lately, however, I have been thinking of abandoning it and going to that town myself, as the Goahiras, who have not bothered this particular section for some years, have been reported as on the warpath for white scalps and plunder. I don't relish the idea of myself and family falling victims to them. Our house is very well protected, it is true, and I have no fear that I and my men could stand off any small stray band of the Indians, but if it came to several hundred of those savage rascals descending upon us in a body, the case would become serious. Now that I have told you about myself, I should be glad to have you boys introduce yourselves, for it is a great pleasure for me to meet a couple of real Americans out in this unfrequented region."

"My name is Tom Gilbert, and my companion is Bob Lawrence. I hail from Rockhaven, a small village on the coast of Massachusetts, to the east of Boston. I am an orphan, and though I lived with a man who said he was my legal guardian, I worked for him like a slave, and all I got for it was my support, such as it was. Practically, I am at this moment cast adrift on the world, and consequently my own boss. Now, Bob, it's your turn to go into details."

Bob grinned and said he was raised in New York.

That his father died when he was quite young, and his mother married a man who made life miserable for him to such an extent that he finally ran away to sea, and had been working aboard various craft during the last three years.

"I guess that's about all, and not very interesting at that," he concluded.

"Now, Mr. Sterling," said Tom, "if you'll step into the boat we'll put off and row you, by easy stages, up the river. You can't expect us to make fast time, as we're not used to this roasting climate."

"I don't expect you to do any rowing at all. I'll manipulate the oars myself, as I am taking you out of your way. However, I hope to persuade you to pass a week at least with us at our place, and I'll try to make things interesting for you. After that I'll furnish you with mules and an escort overland to Carthagená, which will save you all the risk and trouble of going by water along the coast."

"You are very kind, sir," replied Tom, delighted at the prospect that Mr. Sterling's words opened up before them. "I think that will suit Bob and me immensely."

"Consider that settled, then," said Mr. Sterling, dipping

the oars in the water and beginning to pull a strong, steady stroke.

At that moment an enormous alligator pushed his snout out of the water within a yard of the boat.

"Great Scott! Look at that fellow, Bob!" cried Tom, pointing.

"He's a corker for fair," nodded Bob, grabbing up the can they had emptied of potted meat for their breakfast that morning and shying it at the saurian's nose.

The alligator opened his enormous mouth, showing a glittering array of teeth, and snapped in the can like a flash.

"I hope he'll enjoy that morsel," laughed Bob, looking around for something else to throw.

"I've a great mind to take a shot at him," said Tom, grabbing up his rifle.

"The only vulnerable part is his eye, or down his throat," said Mr. Sterling.

The alligator, as though he had heard and understood this reference to himself, sank out of sight, leaving only a widening ripple behind to show where he had been.

"Are there many of his size around here?" asked Tom.

"Are they?" laughed Mr. Sterling. "A few thousand, more or less."

"Do they attack a person without provocation?"

"Well, rather," replied the gentleman, drily. "It is very dangerous even to draw water from the river above here, where the water is fresh. Scarcely a year passes in a neighborhood frequented by them that several native women are not destroyed while filling their pitchers with water. The crafty saurians will dart out of the water, seize its victim by the exposed arm and drag her into the water. Then it's all up with her."

"Gee whiz!" gasped Tom. "I always had an idea that they were dead slow in their movements, on land at any rate, on account of their unwieldy shapes."

"Under ordinary circumstances they do move with the slowness of a salamander; but when excited, either by rage or hunger, they dart forward toward the object at which they aim with extraordinary quickness. It never pays to take any chances with them. As for bathing anywhere in the river it is much as your life is worth to risk it."

"Then I'd rather be excused from taking a swim," replied Tom, with a grimace.

Thus they passed away the time, while Mr. Sterling, who seemed accustomed to continuous exertion in the intense heat, worked with a steady and powerful stroke at the oars, pausing only at intervals to rest himself.

Inside of a couple of hours they came in sight of a small landing place, toward which the rower directed his course.

This place was near the head of the second lake, and through the tropical foliage the boys caught sight of several small dwellings, and finally a substantial building of two stories perched upon a small hillock commanding a good view of the lake.

"Yonder is where I live," said Mr. Sterling, after a

glance over his shoulder. "Welcome, my lads, to Sterling Castle."

CHAPTER IX.

"CASTLE STERLING."

As they drew near to the landing, the boys saw two or three native women peering at them through the trees.

A white man, a native of the country, came down on the wharf and gazed at the approaching boat in some surprise.

Visitors by water seemed to be something out of the ordinary run of events.

"That's Pedro Gonsalvo, my overseer," said Mr. Sterling. "He is rather astonished, I guess, to see me aboard a strange boat, with a couple of passengers new to the district. We don't often have visitors."

The speaker drew in his oars and allowed the little craft to slip up to the wharf, where its bow was caught by Pedro, who pulled the painter out and made it fast to a ring-bolt in a post.

A brief conversation in Spanish ensued between Mr. Sterling and his overseer after he stepped out of the boat.

Then he motioned to the boys to disembark, and introduced them to his employee.

This formality over, they left the craft to the care of Pedro and walked up the inclined ground, through a dense foliage, toward the house.

Mr. Sterling employed half a dozen white hands, exclusive of the overseer, and also gave work to three-score of natives, male and female, who lived together in a bunch of huts.

The big house was divided into two sections, one for the family and one for Pedro and the white men.

The boys could only see the upper half of the second story as they drew near, for it was completely surrounded by a stout stockade, as a defence against an attack by the Indians.

Three years had gone by since this little colony had been last disturbed by the Goahiras.

The rascals had attempted a night surprise, but though nearly 100 participated in the assault they were so roughly handled by the plucky defenders that they retired with considerable loss, and had since then given the place a wide berth.

The chief cause of their defeat was that they were known to be in the neighborhood and preparing for the attack, and Mr. Sterling, like his father-in-law before him, never took any chances, but always kept half a dozen of the natives in his employ always scouring the country round-out on the lookout for the appearance of the enemy.

These natives were expert sleuths in their line of business, and it was almost impossible for any band of Indians to get within five miles of the Sterling Castle without their presence being discovered and the news carried to headquarters with the swiftness of the wind.

Of late, however, word had been sent in from outlying

plantations of a general uprising of the Goahiras against whites and blacks alike.

A band of 600 or more had burned and looted one plantation and murdered all but a couple of fleet-footed blacks who had effected their escape and carried the alarm to the nearest civilized place.

Intelligence had also been received of the wiping out of a whole village within twenty miles of the Sterling property.

Successes of this kind naturally tended to embolden the Indians, and bring more of them out on the warpath.

The heavy door of the stockade stood wide open, and through this Mr. Sterling and his young guests passed.

Right before them was a wide, shaded veranda, which extended all around the building.

There were numerous tropical trees growing within the enclosure, around several of which were built circular benches.

Under the inviting shade of one of these was seated a handsome lady of thirty-five, the olive tint of whose countenance betokened her Spanish origin.

At her feet reclined a lovely girl of fifteen years, with golden-brown hair, a plump, rounded figure, dark, melting eyes, and a tiny rosebud of a mouth.

These two were Senora Sterling and her daughter Estella.

Two younger children were swinging in a hammock under adjacent trees.

With the appearance of Mr. Sterling the children in the hammock sprang out and ran towards him, but paused in shy wonderment on seeing Tom and Bob.

Mrs. Sterling and Estella both rose to receive the strangers.

"Inez," said Mr. Sterling, "I have brought home two visitors who will stay with us a little while. They are young countrymen of mine, lately wrecked on our coast, and I'm sure you will tender them the hospitalities of our home. This is Thomas Gilbert, and this is Robert Lawrence. My lads, this is my wife, and this my daughter Estella. You must make yourselves at home. There is no ceremony at Castle Sterling."

The boys bowed and the senora and her daughter smiled charmingly and held out their hands in friendly welcome, at the same time greeting them in excellent English; indeed, Estella spoke the language perfectly, as did her younger brother and sister.

Tom and Bob were far from being bashful, and were soon on easy terms with the lady of the house and her children.

Tom took the youngest child, a girl of eight, on his knee, and after her timidity wore off she seemed to take wonderfully to the boy.

"I'm under great obligations to these young men, Inez," said her husband, placing his arm tenderly around the senora's waist. "They rescued me from a very serious predicament."

"Indeed!" she replied, with a look of concern, while Es-

tella and the other children regarded their father wonderingly.

"Yes; it is quite possible that I might never have returned but for them."

Alarm at once showed itself on the lady's features.

"Dearest," she said, "is it the Indians——"

"Oh, no; something altogether different," replied Mr. Sterling, who then recounted the mishap he had met with that morning in his deer-hunting expedition.

The senora and her children knew that that section of the river where the husband and father had been caught at a disadvantage was the most dangerous of any in that vicinity, though barely eight miles from home as the crow flies.

To return to the "castle" from that spot he would have been compelled to have threaded many miles of a trackless forest infested with jaguars, boa constrictors, and other venomous creatures, that would have proved a constant menace to him.

The senora immediately began to thank the boys for the service they had rendered her husband.

"You needn't thank us, ma'am," said Tom. "It was just pure luck that brought us to the spot where Mr. Sterling was, and we couldn't do less than take him off when he requested us to. Nobody but a selfish hog would have refused."

Nevertheless, the senora was grateful to the boys, and determined to do all in her power to make their stay at the castle pleasant.

Estella seemed to prefer Tom's society to that of Bob's, and probably the lad was considerably flattered by her preference; but though quite sensible of her girlish loveliness, he could not forget the picture in his mind's eye of Fanny Gibbs kneeling on the plateau of the Rockhaven cliff, with her arms outstretched to him as Captain Barnacle and his two sailors bore him out to the schooner.

Neither could he forget her song that night, the words of which he had heard her utter till she shrieked for her father.

He knew that Fanny loved him, and that he loved Fanny, therefore the charms of another girl, even more lovely, did not easily swerve him from his allegiance to the girl he had left behind him.

CHAPTER X.

PREPARING TO RECEIVE THE ENEMY.

Dinner was served about one o'clock in a big room on the ground floor, and the boys enjoyed the many good things set before them.

After the meal, Mr. Sterling showed his young guests over his plantation, told them what crops he raised, and explained how the work was carried on.

The boys spent the rest of the afternoon lounging around the enclosure and talking to Estella, whom they found to be an interesting and intelligent girl.

About sundown supper was announced, and the family and the lads sat down to partake of it.

The conversation turned upon the possibility of a visit from the Goahiras in sufficient force to make things unpleasant for the plantation and Castle Sterling.

One of the inside scouts had come in a little while before and reported that he was sure he had seen an Indian gliding through the woods three miles south of the plantation that afternoon.

Mr. Sterling seemed to think the native had been mistaken, though he asserted the fact with considerable emphasis.

The appearance of a single Indian would indicate the presence of a considerable number of the rascals in the neighborhood, and that fact could scarcely escape the notice of the outer line of scouts, one of whom would surely have hastened to report the news.

"If the Indians are on the warpath, as you say," said Tom, "do you think that they are likely to attack this place?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if they made it their business to come this way, for they owe us a grudge for their defeat three years ago. Unless they should appear in uncommonly large numbers I don't think they would gain much, for we are well prepared to receive them. I have a small armory of magazine rifles and heavy caliber revolvers in the house, and an abundant supply of ammunition. In addition, I have a small field piece and a quantity of language that would make matters exceedingly interesting for them at close quarters. Should they invest the place with the view of starving us out, they would hardly succeed, as I have provisions enough stored inside this house to feed all hands for a month. As for water, an underground passage connects with a natural spring in an adjacent thicket. Altogether I have taken every precaution to ensure safety and provide against surprise," said Mr. Sterling.

"Well, if they should come while Bob and I are here you can count on us to help you out. Did your overseer bring our rifles up?"

"Yes. They are standing in the passage, with the bags of ammunition."

"Your stockade looks strong enough to stand off a swell army of Indians," said Tom.

"Yes. It's a formidable barrier, but not wholly effective against a very large force. Half an hour, or even less, however, would suffice to transform this building into a fortress. I have barricades for all the windows and outer doors stored in an outhouse.

At that moment the overseer appeared in the doorway and beckoned to Mr. Sterling, who arose from his seat and went to see what he wanted.

"Two of our scouts have just come in with the news that a large body of the Goahiras, four or five hundred at least, are camped along the river, nine miles to the south of this place," said Pedro, in Spanish. "Our men ascertained that an attack on us is to be made during the early morning hours, the Indians hoping to take us by

surprise, carry the stockade by storm, and burn the building down with all in it."

That was serious information, truly, and disturbed Mr. Sterling not a little.

Four or five hundred Indians was a formidable bunch to contend with, especially as many of the Goahiras were provided with Mauser rifles, and knew how to use them.

The male defenders, all told, amounted to eight white men, the two boys, and twenty native workers, including the scouts, three of whom were still outside on the lookout.

The stockade, or outer line of defence, was eighteen feet high, built of stout logs, firmly planted in the earth, two rows deep, with a barbed wire running along on top, and two rows of it, a yard apart, along the sides.

Casemated loopholes were cut in the logs at intervals of a yard, the outer opening being just large enough to accommodate the barrel of a rifle and leave space enough above to take a sight.

A deep six-foot trench extended all around the stockade, except in front of the big gate, which was extraordinary stout and provided with a port-hole, protected by an iron trap that worked up and down in grooves, through which the field piece covered the approach in that direction.

The house itself, or citadel as it might be called, was built of stone, and when its openings were barricaded was capable of strong resistance to an attacking force.

Its only real weakness was the encircling-covered veranda, which would offer climbing facilities to the second story.

The roof was parapetted, and commanded approach from all directions.

Mr. Sterling, after a moment's consideration, issued directions to Pedro, and the overseer left the building to attend to them.

The gentleman of the house then returned to the table to finish his supper.

His wife saw by his manner that he had received unpleasant news, and she asked what the overseer had called him outside for.

In order not to alarm his wife and children, Mr. Sterling concealed the real seriousness of the situation, merely intimating that a force of the enemy had been discovered within a few miles of the place, and that to be on the safe side he proposed to take every precaution against an unexpected attack.

"Do you really believe that the Indians will make an attack to-night?" asked Tom.

"It is not unlikely."

"If they do I guess you will be prepared to give them a warm reception. I don't know whether there's fighting blood in me or not, but somehow I think I should like nothing better than getting into a scrap with those Goahiras, who cannot mind their own business and leave peaceable people alone."

"A scrap of that kind would suit me, too," chipped in Bob. "I hate injuns, anyway, and from what I've heard

of these fellows I'd like to help give them all that's coming to them."

"Well, my lads, I'm glad to see that you're plucky and willing to lend a hand in the defence of the place. It may seem hard to press one's guests into service, on the very day of their arrival at that, but our garrison is none too strong at the best, and every extra arm counts for a whole lot," said Mr. Sterling.

The meal was not hurried by the excitement of the moment, as there was nothing in the gentleman's manner to indicate that a crisis was close at hand, but outside the stockade things were different.

The overseer had called the natives together, told them what was in the wind, and ordered them to remove their families and belongings of most value to the long, stone outhouse built against one side of the enclosure.

The horses, mules and a portion of the live stock were driven into the stockade, but the rest were secured in a stone outhouse in the midst of the clearing, and there left to take their chances.

A scene of great activity greeted the boys when they came out on the veranda after supper.

It was now dark, but the courtyard was lighted up by several large reflecting lamps that cast a gleam like small searchlights.

The white laborers were bringing out the barricades so as to have them handy to put into place at the last moment.

"Haven't you anything for us to do, Mr. Sterling?" asked Tom, with a thrill of excitement in his voice. "Bob and I would like to get busy."

"That's what we would," agreed Bob.

"Well, my lads, you can help me pull the cannon down near the gate, if you like," replied the master of the place.

"All right, sir," answered both boys with alacrity, following him out to the outhouse where the field-piece was kept.

The gun was easy to handle, so Tom and Bob grabbed the chain attached to the carriage and ran it down to the gate in no time at all.

"I'd like to help work this thing," said Bob, with enthusiasm.

"So would I," coincided Tom. "Suppose we volunteer to do it?"

"I'm with you."

"A single discharge of grape would mow down every Indian within yards that attempted to charge across that narrow path toward this gate."

"You can bet your life it would. Almost as good as a Gatling gun."

"Well, let's go to the house for the ammunition," said Tom, starting off.

They soon had a pile of the terrible missiles, which consisted of bolt, nails and other pieces of iron fastened together, and a box of powder bags, each representing the proper charge, piled up near the gun.

When the clock in the sitting-room struck nine, everything was in readiness to meet the foe.

The big gate was closed and secured with heavy cross-pieces that defied any kind of a battering-ram that could be brought to bear.

A watcher was perched on it with a rope ladder to toss down to the scouts still out if they returned before the place was invested by the enemy.

The house barricades were in place, and so strong was the appearance of the main building that the boys, who had repaired to the roof with Mr. Sterling, and the overseer, believed that it was impregnable against any attack that could be made by the Indians if they did succeed in passing the stockade.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ATTACK.

As the night advanced the moon rose in a cloudless sky and made the whole neighborhood almost as bright as day.

Mr. Sterling cautioned the boys to keep out of sight behind the parapet, for it was probable that the enemy would send scouts out in advance to reconnoiter, and it was not advisable that they should learn that their attack was anticipated.

There was a line of woods at no great distance, within the shadow of which they could make their observations without danger of discovery.

In the center of the roof was a cupola to which Mr. Sterling and the overseer retired for the purpose of keeping a watch over the landscape, unobserved.

"This is getting tiresome," said Tom, with a yawn, after the lapse of an hour. "I wonder when those rascals will turn up?"

"I heard Mr. Sterling say that he does not expect them to come until along toward morning—say about two or three o'clock," replied Bob.

"Is that so? Then we'd better turn in for a short snooze, hadn't we? I'm dead tired, to tell the truth. While there was excitement in the air I didn't feel a bit sleepy, but since things have quieted down I can hardly keep my eyes open."

"Well, we'll stretch out right here on the roof," said Bob. "It's a good deal better than a hot room below."

"I guess you're right, but they say it isn't a good thing to sleep with the moon on your face."

"Then we'll get around behind the cupola where there's shadow. Come on."

The boys changed their place, stretched themselves out near the door of the observation tower and inside of five minutes were sound asleep.

Soon after midnight, while they slept on, two of the three advance scouts appeared before the stockade and were helped over the wall.

They reported that six or seven hundred of the Goahiras were advancing on the plantation in two detachments, and that a third at least of them were armed with Mausers.

Mr. Sterling was seriously concerned at this news, and

he was compelled to admit that in spite of their strongly fortified position their situation was a critical one.

How twenty-seven men and two boys, even if they were expert marksmen, could keep such a body of assailants at bay was a grave problem.

The Goahiras were known to be daring and reckless fighters, and, as they held a grudge against the Sterling stronghold for their signal defeat of three years back, it might be expected that they would stop at nothing to accomplish their present purpose.

If they once got the better of the defenders they wouldn't leave a man or woman or child of them alive.

Their course in warfare was complete extermination, and there wasn't any doubt but that they meant business this trip.

Nearly three hours passed and still there was no sign of the enemy.

The moon was going down behind the trees, and the roof of the castle was now no longer illuminated, which was a great advantage to the defenders.

The clock struck the hour of three.

At that moment the last of the scouts crept, like a gliding shadow, up to the gate, was recognized and assisted into the stockade.

He said that the woods to the west was full of the Goahiras, and that they were preparing to attack the plantation.

When this intelligence was communicated to the master of the house he issued his final directions to his little force.

Pedro awakened Tom and Bob.

"Come," he said. "Are you ready to go with me to the post of danger—the gate? You offered to help work the field gun. Have you changed your minds?"

"Not on your life we haven't!" replied Tom, promptly.

"We'll work the old thing for all it's worth, bet your life," said Bob.

"Follow me, then, young senors. I am glad to have two such brave Americanos with me."

The boys followed him down to the courtyard and thence to the spot where the brass field-piece stood, grim and silent, ready for business.

"If the rascals succeed in scaling the stockade at any point in numbers our name is likely to be mud," said Bob, looking around the enclosure.

"Well," replied Tom, "we're here to do our duty, and I'm going to do it, for one, no matter what the consequences may be."

"That's the way to talk, Tom," replied Bob, enthusiastically. "Never give up the ship. I only wish there was an American flag flying over us, it would stir me up more."

Pedro now showed the boys how to load the cannon.

"When I give the word, you," indicating Bob, "raise the trap. And you," to Tom, "help me shove the muzzle just out of the hole. The moment she is discharged, drop the trap, for the recoil will send the gun back out of the hole. Understand?"

They understood and said so.

The field-piece, being now all ready, was pushed almost against the trap, and then Pedro applied his eye to a peep-hole to watch for the appearance of the foe.

From his post on the roof, Mr. Sterling caught the first sight of the enemy.

They issued from the woods in great numbers, one section of them closing in on the huts deserted by the natives, while the main body came toward the stockade, aiming to begin their attack from the front, where they knew the gate to be facing a solid path.

Evidently they were aware that the stockade on the sides presented difficulties not easily to be overcome.

They had no knowledge that the castle was defended by a cannon ready to carry death and dismay into their ranks."

The huts were surrounded, but the attack on them was delayed until the main body started to charge on the gate.

The defenders gave no intimation that they were on the watch with their rifles ready to open a destructive fire.

All waited for Mr. Sterling on the roof to give the signal with a rifle shot.

"They're coming on," said Pedro to the boys. "Take a look."

Each in turn applied his eye to the peep-hole, and their blood quickened with suppressed excitement as they saw the crowd of Indians thicken, forty yards away, and then begin their advance on the gate as silent as so many ghosts.

"There'll be something doing in a moment," Bob whispered to Tom.

"You bet there will," was the reply. "They won't know what struck them when this gun goes off."

"It would be a fine thing if it would make them go off, too."

"No such luck, until we beat them off."

Quickly the Indians advanced in a bunch toward the gate, each more eager than his companion to be the first over the top of the stockade.

They presented a fine target for the cannon.

Pedro motioned Bob to be ready to raise the trap, and then stood with his eye at the hole.

The Indians now came forward with a rush, and Pedro sprang to the gun.

Crack!

The single report of Sterling's rifle awoke the echoes of the night air.

As if this was a signal to the enemy, a tremendous blood-curdling yell burst from hundreds of their throats, shattering the silence of the night.

It was drowned by the simultaneous discharge of the cannon and four-and-twenty rifle shots from the stockade.

The Goahiras were taken completely by surprise.

The sweeping charge of iron tore their onward rush to pieces, and those who escaped fell back in paralyzed dismay.

At the same time the Indians who had pounced upon the huts uttered shrieks of disappointment on finding them all empty.

During the confusion that ensued the defenders main-

tained a continuous and murderous fire into their ranks, while Pedro and the two boys sponged out the cannon and reloaded it.

The din outside now was tremendous.

The whole plan of the Indians' attack had been upset, and it was some minutes before they renewed their attack.

Then the main body came on again for the gate.

They were greeted by another volley of old iron and bolts that tore through their ranks like hail through a wheat field.

The air was filled with death cries and the wails of the badly mangled survivors.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom, his eyes glistening with excitement. "Sponge her out Bob. Quick! They'll be on us again in a moment."

Hundreds of the enemy sought shelter behind the huts, the stone outhouse, trees, and any place that offered shelter, and a cloud of arrows, and a rain of Mauser bullets was opened on the stockade.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESPERATE FIGHT.

"Gee! This is a regular battle, Bob," said Tom.

Whiz! Thud!

An arrow had skimmed past Bob's ear and struck the side of the gate, where it quivered for a moment like a thing of life.

"Wow!" exclaimed Bob, jumping a foot, with a cry of dismay.

A second arrow struck the inside of the stockade a short distance away.

The boys' first idea was that some of the Indians had surmounted a portion of the wall and were shooting at them, but they soon saw that this was not so.

The Goahiras were simply shooting hundreds of arrows over the stockade at random, expecting that some of them would do execution.

To be shot at in this fashion made Tom and Bob not a little nervous, but the indications outside that a third attack was about to be made on the gate chased their fears away.

Looking through the peep-hole, the boys saw that the pathway and ground beyond was strewn with dead and wounded Indians, who had fallen before the two discharges.

"This gun is all to the good, Bob," said Tom. "They'll never be able to reach the top of the gate as long as we can hold out."

"I guess we'll hold out all right, if none of those blamed arrows make a hole in us."

Whiz! Thud!

Another landed close to Bob's head and made him duck.

"What did you duck for, Bob?" laughed Tom. "The damage was done before you made a move."

"I guess you'd duck if one of them took the skin off your ear."

"Perhaps I would, but what good would it do?"

"Here they come again," warned Pedro.

Two or three hundred of the rascals came dashing towards the gate and ditch as well.

Evidently they intended to get over in spite of the gun.

Up went the trap, out went the muzzle of the field-piece and then Pedro pulled the lanyard.

The roar of the cannon mingled with the infernal yelling of the Indians.

Dozens of them went down that time, but the Goahiras were only checked for a moment this time.

While the boys were cleaning out and loading the gun they reached the gate and piled into the ditch, climbing on one another's shoulders and grasping at the top of the stockade.

Their hands and bodies were torn by the barbed wire, a species of defence they had not expected to meet with.

The attack on the stockade was simultaneous on all sides, but the height of the wall, from the bottom of the ditch, and the barbed wire, bothered them tremendously.

The defenders deserted the loop-holes and sought the shelter of the veranda, ready to pick off the Indians as their heads appeared above the wall.

The shooting of arrows over the wall had stopped, the whole energies of the attacking party concentrating itself in a desperate effort to storm the whole line of stockade.

If they were successful, not only the cannon but the entire courtyard would have to be abandoned and the defence centered in the citadel.

Whether Pedro and his gallant young assistants would be able to make good their retreat before they were cut off was a problem.

Sterling, however, had given orders to his men to cover their retreat at all hazards, and consequently a third of the marksmen gathered at that end of the house.

Dozens of the Indians reached the top of the wall, but so hampered were they by the wire on top as well as that around the sides that they could not move fast enough to avoid the bullets of the marksmen on the veranda, who picked them off as they would crows on a rail fence.

Pedro, Tom and Bob continued to work like beavers at the gun, which, owing to the rapidity with which it was discharged, grew too hot for safety, and the overseer had to call a halt.

They seized their rifles and rejoined the others on the veranda, carrying the box of powder-bags with them.

"This puts me in mind of a picture I saw once of a wild west fort attacked by Indians," said Tom, with his eye trained on the top of the gate.

Bob didn't answer.

He raised his rifle suddenly to his shoulder and blazed away at a Goahira who had slipped over the dead body of a comrade that lay across the wall and landed in the courtyard.

The rascal threw up his hands, staggered several yards and then fell on his face.

"I settled that chap's hash, bet your life," said Bob, looking for another victim.

"We must have killed and wounded a lot of those fellows by this time," said Tom. "I'll bet we cleaned up over a hundred at the gate alone."

"More than that," asserted Bob. "Gee whiz! There's six on the gate now. Work lively, Tom."

Rapid spurts of flame illuminated the darkness as half a dozen rifles were turned on the Indians.

Now that the cannon had ceased clearing the path, the gate was the weak spot in the line of defence, and the Goahiras were quick to take advantage of the fact.

They began coming over the gate in increasing numbers, but every one met his fate on top and either tumbled back on his fellows or down beside the cannon on the inside.

"My rifle is getting hot, too," said Tom. "If those rascals keep this up they're bound to get in in spite of everything we can do to prevent them. One would think there were millions of them outside."

"There's a whole lot, all right," replied Bob.

Fresh rifles were passed around to the defenders every little while, so that their fire was kept up unchecked.

Tom, for the first time, noticed that several of the native women were on the veranda, too, firing away to beat the band.

The fight had now lasted half an hour, and was a thoroughly desperate and stubborn affray.

There was every evidence that the enemy had suffered terribly, for few bullets of the defenders were thrown away.

Their aim was too accurate and the distance too short to permit them to miss their targets.

Every Indian, when he appeared at the top of the stockade, was outlined against the star-lit sky, and he made an excellent mark.

So fierce and desperate was the attacking party that they seemed to think nothing of throwing their lives away in the chance of getting into the stockade.

A few got clear over the gate, but they were shot down like sheep instantly afterward.

The carnage around the gate was something fearful, and still the Indians came on, hoping to prevail through sheer force of numbers.

At last Pedro called to Tom and Bob to go back to the gun.

This was a perilous undertaking now, and was growing worse every moment.

For a moment the boys hesitated, for it seemed like sure death to them, but when Pedro started off alone they followed him at once.

When they reached the gate several dark forms dropped down upon them, but fortunately they were either dead or badly wounded men.

The overseer turned his attention to the gun.

Tom and Bob were now so thoroughly worked up by the excitement and strain of the desperate battle for life that they no longer thought of the perils of their position.

They had reached that stage that makes heroes even of comparative cowards in battle.

If bullets had rained about their heads they would not have turned a hair.

While Pedro was yanking the dead bodies away from the gun the boys reloaded it.

When the trap was raised and the muzzle of the piece was pushed through the hole it struck a savage on the outside.

Before he knew what had hit him, he and scores of his companions were blown away like so much chaff by the first discharge.

Several yards of the path was cleared of the assailants and brought the assault on the gate to a momentary halt.

It was soon renewed with greater fury than ever, but once again the gun poured its terrible load of bolts and old iron into the crowded ranks and upset the calculations of the attacking party.

Many of the Goahiras had gone to their death since the attack commenced, but more still remained, thirsting for vengeance.

Inside of ten minutes, in spite of all they could do, they were driven from the path, and the grand attack was called off for the time being.

The vanquished Indians retired to the shelter of the woods to recover from the awful handling they had received.

It was probable that they began to suspect that a body of soldiers from Carthage had reinforced the small garrison of the castle, and perhaps they began to doubt whether they could capture the stockade at all.

CHAPTER XIII.

BOB'S CLOSE CALL.

The cessation of the battle was hailed as a blessed relief by the little band of defenders, whose arms were growing numb from the continuous discharge of their rifles.

The deafening uproar was now succeeded by a silence unbroken save by the cries of the wounded in the trenches at the base of the stockade.

Sterling took an inventory of the casualties on his side and found that only three of his people had been wounded by arrows.

Hot chocolate was soon passed around among the smoke and powder begrimed men by the native women.

Forty dead bodies were counted inside the stockade, where they had fallen from the walls.

While the men rested with fresh rifles, by their side a sharp watch against a renewal of the assault was kept on the roof of the citadel.

Pedro, Tom and Bob were a sight to behold when they came upon the veranda after the attack had ceased.

Their faces and hands were as black as negroes, and rills of perspiration made fantastic channels through the grime.

Sterling seized each of the boys by the hand.

"You have acted like heroes, my lads. Indeed, your

work, with Pedro's, at the gun has probably done more than anything else to defeat the enemy. You three bore the brunt of the battle, were in the greatest danger at all times, and you've labored like Trojans. You are entitled to the thanks and gratitude of every soul within the stockade, and if we are so fortunate as to win out in the end you shall not go unrewarded, I assure you."

"We don't want any reward," replied Tom, stoutly. "We have only done our duty, and that's what was expected of every one here in the face of so grave a peril."

"That's right," nodded Bob. "No reward for us, bet your boots!"

"My brave lads, I never before felt so proud of the fact that I am an American as I do at this moment. I see in you the spirit that animates all my countrymen. It is the same spirit that won the glorious independence of the United States and walloped Mexico to a standstill. Blood will tell every time. We may have been fighting merely Indians, but a more desperate and determined assault than that through which we have just passed could hardly have been made by the trained veterans of many battles."

"It was pretty fierce," admitted Tom. "And I suppose we're not yet out of the woods."

"No. The attack may be resumed at any moment. The enemy are taking a breathing spell. I fear they are muttering vengeance against us for the carnage we have inflicted on them. Had I double my present force here I should have little fear of the ultimate result, but as it is I am much encouraged by the showing we have made, as well as the effectiveness of the stockade. That barbed wire has no doubt really been our salvation. That and the field gun. They were cheap investments in the light of results."

Mr. Sterling walked away, leaving the boys together.

"Jerusalem! But we've had a hot time in the old stockade to-night, bet your life!" grinned Bob.

"I'll bet we have. We ought to have our photographs taken. If I look anything like you I must be a peach."

"If I had your face I'd go and souse it in a bucket," replied Bob.

"I don't believe my face is any worse than yours, for you couldn't be much blacker."

"Well, there isn't any use washing up yet. We may have to go back to the gun at any moment."

The fight, however, was not renewed.

Whether the enemy had given up the attempt to capture the stockade and had retired from the neighborhood, or were concealed in the dense wood to the west, the watcher on the roof of the main building could not tell.

There was no relaxation of alertness on the part of the defenders, notwithstanding the absence of all signs indicating the presence of the enemy.

They did not propose to be caught off their guard.

Shortly before sunrise two of the scouts were sent out to reconnoiter.

One of them returned an hour later with word that the Goahiras had returned to their camp nine miles up the river and that they seemed to be badly demoralized.

This news was greeted by the wearied little garrison with great satisfaction.

Sterling ordered the gate to be opened and the bodies lying about the enclosure to be carried down to the river and thrown into the water.

This proceeding soon attracted the notice of every alligator in the vicinity.

Tom and Bob lent a hand in getting rid of the corpses, though they couldn't avoid a shudder every time they approached the landing place, when they saw the alligators darting forward to seize each fresh morsel as it was dumped overboard.

After the stockade was cleared of the dead, and the dozen odd bodies had been removed from the top of the walls, the more horrible task of getting rid of some bodies outside, many of them in a terribly mangled shape from the bits of iron that had torn their flesh in every imaginable way, was undertaken.

The alligators in that neighborhood were ere long satiated and the splash of a body in the river met with no responsive splash from a saurian's tail, so that the corpses floated down with the tide, to be devoured later on by other alligators.

Neither Tom nor Bob took part in the work of moving the dead Indians from the trenches and space in front of the gate.

They had had quite enough of that kind of exercise to satisfy them.

They were glad to monopolize a couple of pails of water and some common laundry soap which, together with a coarse towel, soon removed all traces of the smoke and powder grime from their persons.

All the barricades were removed from the doors and windows, and when the boys were called to breakfast things looked pretty much as they were the day before.

A sharp watch was maintained by the scouts on the enemy's camp, and late in the afternoon word was brought in that the whole crowd of Goahiras had departed southward.

The day was devoted to rest and sleep.

Soon after the intelligence came that the enemy was taking themselves off, the natives and their families returned to their huts and put them in order again.

Tom and Bob were, with Pedro, regarded by all as the real heroes of the fight, and Senora Sterling, her husband and their children, could not do enough for the brave lads.

"We are having the time of our lives here, old man," said Tom to Bob, on the second day after the night battle.

"That's what we are," grinned Bob.

"When it's time for us to go I'm afraid we will feel homesick, for there's nothing ahead of us that I see but hard work to make our way in the world. I want to get back to Rockhaven for two reasons."

"What are they?"

"I am anxious to see my particular friend, Fanny Gibbs, again, and I want to get back at Captain Barnacle, of the fishing schooner Mary Ellen, for kidnapping me from the

village. He didn't gain anything by it, but he has put me to a lot of trouble and worry, and deserves to be punished."

The boys, having learned that there was excellent bird shooting along the western shore of the lower lake, determined to take their boat and go there for a morning's sport.

It was from the eastern, or forest side of this lake, that they had rescued Mr. Sterling.

They had no wish to penetrate the jungle over there for the deer that lived in its fastnesses, on account of the chances of meeting with a jaguar or boa constrictor, some of which were uncommonly large, and all particularly dangerous.

Accordingly, having announced their intention the night before, and being provided with a light breakfast of fried eggs, plantains, tropical fruits and a bowl of thick chocolate, they started, with the help of the tide and a light breeze, soon after sunrise.

The eight miles that intervened between the plantation and the lower lake was soon covered, and the boat was presently among the reeds of the western shore.

As they had brought a substantial lunch along they were in no hurry to get back to the castle.

There was one thing they had to guard against and that was the alligators.

They shot at several to no purpose and finally found a good landing place.

Bob was first to land.

He took the painter and tied it to a small tree.

Then he walked slowly away, expecting Tom to follow him.

Suddenly there was a rustling noise through the bushes near the water's edge and an enormous alligator shot into view, making directly for Bob.

Its back was bent and it appeared higher than usual on its legs, presenting a truly formidable and rather terrifying appearance, especially at such close quarters.

Bob was taken by surprise, and for a moment stood stock still, gazing at the wicked-looking saurian as if fascinated.

Then he let out a yell that attracted Tom's attention, and started to run.

His foot, however, slipped and down he went on all fours.

Before he could scramble to his feet the huge alligator was upon him, with widely distended jaws, and his fate seemed surely to be sealed, for there wasn't a particle of chance of the boy avoiding the scaly monster.

Tom, however, was equal to the occasion.

He grabbed up his rifle, cocked it, and fired full at the alligator's jaw.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT TOM GILBERT DISCOVERED IN THE OLD WRECK.

The ball went down the creature's throat and he stopped, with his great jaws within a foot of Bob's body.

he lay quite dead.

"By jingo! that was a fine shot," said Bob, getting on his legs. "I don't want any narrower escape than that, you can bet your life. I thought I was a goner for sure."

"If I hadn't hit a vital spot you would have been, I'm afraid. The alligator is a monster. He must have been the cock-of-the-walk around these diggings," said Tom.

Bob looked kind of white around the gills, for he had been badly frightened.

He returned to the boat and sat down to recover himself.

"It gives me a turn to look at that villain. I would probably be in his stomach by this time if you hadn't been around. I'll never be able to look at another alligator after this without having a fit."

"Then you will have lots of fits for we are bound to see fifty alligators before we get back to the plantation," laughed Tom.

"Well, let's get away from here and into the woods," said Bob.

"All right; but we want to take a good look around here so as not to miss our landing place."

The boys made a note of the surroundings and then started off in quest of game.

In the course of two hours they had bagged ten large birds of the plover species, two ground doves of a beautiful plumage, three parrots, and wounded a monkey.

They returned to the boat with their spoil, pushed off, and sailed further to the north, in the direction of the Caribbean Sea, along the western shore.

After awhile they landed again, but only succeeded in bringing down another parrot.

"Let's go on and see where we came into this lake that morning in the dark," suggested Bob.

Tom was willing, as they had lots of time on their hands, and the wind holding pretty good they kept along close to the shore.

Bob presently discovered an alligator asleep on a sandpit. He was at the helm and directed the boat close to it.

Then he grabbed his gun, and telling Tom to splash the water with an oar, he waited till the creature opened its eyes when he blazed away at its nearest optic.

The saurian rushed into the water and disappeared.

"You're a fine shot, I don't think," laughed Tom. "You ought to have plunked his eye as easy as winking."

"I'm willing to swear that I did," replied Bob, disappointedly.

"If you had you'd have killed him. The ball may have struck one of the scales alongside his eye. You were too eager that time."

"I guess I was," admitted Bob.

"Yonder is the entrance to the lake," said Tom, pointing. "Beyond are the three mouths of the river Mr. Sterling told us about. We came in at the eastern one, followed the shore and thus got into the lake."

"There isn't much doubt of that. Hello! What's that yonder?"

"Looks like an old wreck."

"I'm going to head for it."

They were soon alongside the wreck of a good-sized vessel, that had sunk in the mud almost up to her bends.

All of her rotting woodwork above that was exposed, as the tide was low.

Her stern overhung the water, and Tom, making a spring, was soon standing on her after-deck.

"Here, catch the painter and fasten it somewhere," called Bob.

Tom caught the rope and tied it to the top of the splintered rudder-post.

Then Bob clambered on board, and they both began to look around this derelict of the sea.

They looked into the cabin, and from its appearance it was evidently awash twice a day when the tide was up.

They walked around the soft, yielding floor, for the wood was rotting fast, and looked into the staterooms on either side, and into what they judged had been the captain's, which was directly abaft.

Everything had been cleaned out.

Not the ghost of an article of any kind remained.

"I guess the Injuns went through this craft when she first came ashore in here," said Bob. "They didn't leave much for any one else to find."

"Did you expect to find anything?" asked Tom. "Why, this vessel looks as if she's been lying here for an age."

"I judge she has. Come on, let's get out on deck."

Tom was standing in the middle of the captain's stateroom, and he turned to follow Bob.

As he did so a square piece of wood, that looked like a trap, gave away under his feet and he went down into a hole up to his knees.

Bob heard the crunching sound and turned around.

"Hello!" he grinned. "Where are you going all of a sudden? Into the hold?"

"Not quite so far as that," replied Tom. "I've fetched up against something solid."

He stepped out, struck a match and flashed it down the hole.

"Say, Bob," he said, "there's a couple of boxes down here. Let's get them out and see what's in them?"

Bob came back and looked.

They looked as if they were made of light mahogany, and had brass corners.

Each was about eighteen inches long by a foot square, and perhaps eight inches deep, and they were locked as tight as a drum.

One of them was very heavy, the other about half as weighty.

After some muscular exertion they landed them on the stateroom floor.

"Finding's keepings, I suppose," laughed Tom.

"If there's anything of value in them I ought to have a share for helping you get them out of that hole, don't you think?" said Bob.

"Yes, that's right; but I don't anticipate that they'll

prove to be very valuable. I'll give you half of what the heavy box contains, or a third of what both contain. Take your choice."

"That's fair enough. I'll take half of the heavy box because I imagine that it might be the cap'n's money-box."

"It's a go. Help me get them into the boat."

It took both of them to convey the heavy box upon deck and into the boat.

Tom returned alone for the lighter box which he found he could carry under his arm.

As there was nothing else of interest about the wreck they shoved off and headed up the lake toward the narrow passage which communicated with the lake beyond, at the head of which stood the plantation.

The tide was in their favor now and the wind was fairly strong and favorable.

They made a quick run and reached the landing about four o'clock.

Tom carried the light box up to the house and showed it to the senora and Estella, who were sitting under a tree.

"I found that and another like it, only heavier, on an old wreck down in the lower lake," he said.

"It looks as if it might contain something of value," said the lady of the house. "I'll have one of my women clean it for you."

"Thank you," replied the boy. "I'll go back to the landing for the other."

"What did you shoot?" said Estella.

"Four parrots and about a dozen other birds of two varieties. Bob wounded a monkey, and he nearly got ate up by an immense alligator."

They wanted to know how that happened, and Tom told them of his companion's narrow escape.

They both shuddered at the recital, for they knew what voracious creatures the alligators were, and what short work they made of their victims.

Bob and Tom brought up the heavy box together and exhibited it.

"What do you think is in it?" asked Estella.

The boys said they had no idea, though Bob hazarded the guess that it might hold gold coin.

"What will you bet on it?" laughed Tom.

"I won't bet. I haven't anything to bet, anyway, and I don't believe you have, either."

"You're not far wrong. Whatever change I had when I was carried off from Rockhaven was in my good trousers, which I shed in the forecastle of the Mary Ellen when the sailor brought this rig to me and told me to get into it."

"You'll have to make Cap'n Barnacle provide you with a new suit when you get back," said Bob.

"If that's all he'll have to put up for the outrage he committed on me he'll be a lucky man. I'm going to put the law on him and make him sweat for his conduct, as sure as my name is Tom Gilbert."

"I would. He deserves it."

Tom sent one of the women down to the boat to ^{put} results of their day's sport, and it was soon on exhibitio^{he} before the senora, her daughter, and the other children.

The boxes were carried on to the veranda for Mr. Sterling to look at when he came in from the fields, after which the boys proposed to break them open.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT THE TWO BOXES CONTAINED.

Mr. Sterling appeared just before sundown.

"Well, my lads," he said, as soon as he spied Tom and Bob under the tree talking with Estella and the children, "did you have a good time?"

"I bet you we did," spoke up Bob.

"What did you bag?"

They told him.

"You ought to have shot a deer. They make fine eating."

"Bob wounded a monkey."

Then Tom narrated his companion's ticklish experience with the alligator.

"You are a very lucky boy, Lawrence," the gentleman said. "If your friend had missed a vulnerable spot you would have been dragged into the water and eaten in short order. I guess you're willing to admit now that the alligators are quicker on their legs even on land than you supposed."

"I bet you they are. That rascal lost no time going for me. He was hungry, I guess, and sized me up as a nice titbit."

"We've got something to show you, sir," said Tom.

"What is it?"

"A couple of mahogany boxes we brought away from an old stranded wreck in the lake below."

"Where did you find them? I was aboard that hulk two years ago, and I could not find a thing in her."

"We, or rather I, found them by accident. They were under the floor of the stateroom at the back of the cabin. They were in a hole covered by a trap. The trap gave away under my weight and that is how I discovered them."

"Where are these boxes?"

"On the veranda."

Mr. Sterling went over and looked at them.

"They look as if they might contain valuable papers, or even money, perhaps," he said.

"One of them is uncommonly heavy, sir," said Tom.

"Is it? Well, we'll open them after supper, if you like, though it seems almost a pity to have to break apart two such well-made boxes."

Mr. Sterling entered the house, and soon afterward the evening meal was announced.

Some of the birds the boys had shot were on the table, and the lads both declared that they tasted all right.

After Mr. Sterling had smoked a cigar on the veranda he called a man and had him carry the boxes into the room on the ground floor that he used as an office.

He tried a bunch of keys on the locks, but to no effect.

Then, procuring a hammer and a wide chisel, he commenced operations on the heavy box.

"Half of whatever is in that box goes to Bob, who waives claim to any share in whatever we find in the other. That's understood, is it, Bob?" asked Tom.

"That's correct. If there isn't some coined money in it I shall be much disappointed."

Mr. Sterling worked carefully, as he wished to pry apart the lock with as little damage as possible to the box.

Finally the lock snapped and the cover flew open.

The box contained eight bags, apparently full of money.

"What did I tell you?" shouted Bob, in great delight.

"It's coin, sure as you live."

The master of the house lifted one of the bags out and shook it.

"It's money," he said. "Probably gold. You are a pair of fortunate boys."

The bags proved to contain about \$1,000 apiece in Spanish gold.

"That's \$4,000 each for us," said Tom. "Quite a little fortune."

"You can bet your life it is," said Bob, smacking his lips over his half of the find. "It's too bad the other isn't full of money, too."

"I wish it was," replied Tom. "Then I'd be worth \$12,000. I wonder what is in it?"

"Papers," suggested Bob.

"It holds something heavier than paper," said Mr. Sterling. "Well, I congratulate you on the result of your find so far. So much money as that isn't picked up very often."

He had more trouble opening the second box, and it took him more than twenty minutes to do it.

A layer of damp cotton first met their eager gaze.

When this was removed they saw a tray filled with large uncut Brazilian diamonds.

In all there were five trays filled with the rough gems.

"I'm not a connoisseur of these stones, but judging from the size and general appearance of the gems I should place their value roughly at anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000," said Mr. Sterling, after an examination of many of the specimens.

The two boys gasped.

"Fifty to a hundred thousand dollars!" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes. They can't be worth less than the first figure. Without knowing their actual value I certainly would not take a cent less than \$75,000 for them as they stand if they belonged to me."

"Good gracious!" cried Tom, quite overcome by this prospect of sudden riches.

"I wish I'd agreed to take a third of the value of both boxes," growled Bob, with a longing look at the uncut gems.

"Never mind, Bob," replied Tom. "If the stones turn out to be as valuable as Mr. Sterling says I'll give you a share in them—say ten per cent."

"Will you?" exclaimed Bob, in delight. "You're a brick."

"I suppose you mean to go back to the States pretty soon," said the gentleman, with a smile.

"Yes, sir," replied Tom.

"Well, I'll have this box securely nailed up for you so that no one will be the wiser as to the character of its contents. Or, if you prefer, I'll go with you to Carthage and see if I can dispose of the diamonds at their actual value. That will save you from the red-tape business of passing the stones through the United States customs, as well as prevent you from the possibility of being cheated when you, ignorant of their real value, attempted to dispose of them in the American market."

"I shall be very much obliged to you if you will do that, sir," said Tom. "I don't know the first thing about how I would go about selling them. I suppose you could have this Spanish gold changed into a draft on a Boston bank, too?"

"Oh, yes! There will be no difficulty about that. Any of the Carthage banks will figure out the exchange value of the coin and furnish you with a draft. There's a line of weekly steamers from Carthage to Kingston and other ports in the West Indies. I'll secure a passage for each of you, and you can take another steamer from Kingston to New York. From there it is but a step to Boston, you know."

The senora and Estella were astonished when they learned of the rich nature of the contents of the two boxes.

"Just to think how long they've lain in the cabin of that old wreck, waiting, as it were, for these young Americans to come over here and discover them. It is really wonderful when you come to consider the matter."

The boys fully agreed with the lady of the house.

Suddenly Tom gave a loud exclamation that drew all eyes to him.

"You'll hardly believe what I'm going to tell you," he said, with sparkling eyes, "but on the afternoon of the day I was kidnapped from the seacoast village where I lived, an old woman, after looking at the palm of my left hand, told me that I would become rich in a short time."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed the senora.

"Yes. I laughed at her, for it was about as impossible a thing as I could well imagine, yet here it has all come out true. She also told me I was going to leave Rockhaven soon, though she didn't say that I was about to be kidnapped. However, she told me that I had an enemy who was conspiring against me. Of course, that was Captain Barnacle, though what he had against me I cannot possibly imagine. She further said that I was going to cross water to a country new and strange to me, and you see I have, much against my will, been forced to come to this country. She also said I would be in peril of my life more than once, and I have. I had forgotten all about her prophesy till the thought that I had become rich brought it before

me again. Strange, wasn't it, how she could read all that in the palm of my hand?"

All agreed that it was.

"Some people seem to be endowed with the extraordinary faculty of looking into the future," said Mr. Sterling. "The gypsy women are more or less versed in the art of reading one's fortune from the lines in the palm of the hand. What there really is in it I do not profess to know. There have been people in all ages and countries who have professed to be able to foretell past, present and future events by means of an observation made of the heavens at the moment of a person's birth. Such persons have called themselves astrologers."

It was a long time before Tom got to sleep that night, and then he had several fantastic dreams, in which he figured as a modern Croesus.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Tom and Bob were induced to prolong their visit at the plantation for a month, as Mr. Sterling, the senora, and their children had taken a great fancy to the lads, Tom especially.

They also made themselves popular among the hands, from Pedro, the overseer, down to the humblest laborer.

At last the day arrived when, accompanied by Mr. Sterling, and an escort of four natives, they bid adieu to the plantation and all on it, and started for the seaport of Carthagena.

The distance to be traversed was about ninety miles, and the line of march lay over and through alternate plain and forest, with here and there a village of more or less importance, in the neighborhood of which were many outlying plantations, at one of which the party put up each night, as Mr. Sterling was well known to all the proprietors for many miles on either side of their route.

They made the trip in a leisurely way, accomplishing about twenty-five miles in each eight hours of travel, and on the evening of the fourth day, after leaving the banks of the Magdalena, they entered the town of Carthagena.

They put up at the principal hotel, and on the following morning Mr. Sterling showed the boys the town, which they found to be the chief seaport of the Republic of Colombia.

It was built on a sandy peninsula of the Caribbean Sea, connected with the continent by a narrow neck of land.

They visited the handsome cathedral, and several of the churches and convents; likewise the fortifications, which they found to be extensive.

On the following day, Mr. Sterling deposited the \$8,000 of Spanish gold with the principal bank, and received two drafts on a Boston bank for equal amounts made out in the names of Tom Gilbert and Bob Lawrence.

Then he started out to dispose of the rough diamonds.

Previous to leaving the plantation Tom had presented to

the senora, her daughter Estella, and Mr. Sterling, their choice of his collection, and had also given Pedro Gonsalvo one of the lesser stones as a present.

It took Mr. Sterling several days to arrange the sale of the diamonds on a satisfactory basis, and when the deal was finally concluded he handed Tom another draft on Boston for \$80,000.

Tom showed it to Bob.

"I'll keep my promise with you, old man," he said. "You shall have ten per cent. of this after I have collected it. That will make you worth \$12,000, and ought to give you a good start in life."

"I'm satisfied," replied Bob. "You're entitled to the bulk of the boodle, as it wouldn't have been found but for you. I consider myself mighty lucky in having run up against you."

Mr. Sterling secured a passage for the boys to Kingston by a steamer of an English line bound for London, and two days after their business had been concluded the boys bade the American good-by, with the promise that some day in the future they would try and pay him and his family another visit.

In due time they disembarked at Kingston, at which port they found a steamer on the point of sailing for New York City.

They took passage on board of her, and in three days entered the harbor of the American metropolis.

"It feels good to reach the land of the good old Stars and Stripes again," said Tom, as the steamer came to anchor at Quarantine.

"You can bet your life it does," replied Bob, enthusiastically. "New York is my old stamping ground, you know; consequently, I'm thoroughly at home here."

"I never was anywhere in this country outside of a limited area of Massachusetts before," answered Tom, "so things are as new to me here as they were in South America."

"Not quite as new, for there isn't much difference between the people of New York and those of Massachusetts."

"I don't mean that. I mean as far as the sights are concerned. I never was in a big city in all my life—not even Boston, and that place isn't such a great way from the little town in which I was born."

"Then I'll have the pleasure of introducing you to the biggest city in the country. Between us we ought to have a good time while we stay here."

"I'm not anxious to stay long, as I am in a hurry to get back to Rockhaven."

"I guess Fanny Gibbs holds a mortgage on you, Tom. Some day you'll cancel it by marrying her."

"I hope so. She's the finest girl in the world."

That afternoon the boys landed in New York and put up at the Astor House.

The first thing they did was to rig themselves out in a new suit apiece, with hats and shoes to match.

Then they purchased a couple of substantial trunks,

which they filled with shirts, underclothing, and everything they needed in that line.

"I'll create a sensation when I make my appearance in Rockhaven," laughed Tom as he viewed himself in a pier glass.

"Among the girls, of course," grinned Bob.

"Among everybody. Why, I'm almost rich enough to buy the village out."

"You don't think of settling there, do you?"

"No. I'm going to Boston as soon as I decide what business I should like to go into."

"I'd like to go into some business with you, Tom. I'm through with the sea for good and all."

"Well, we'll talk about that later on. You'll come to Rockhaven with me, won't you?"

"I'd like to, if there's any place there where I can stop. I've a curiosity to see that girl of yours. I imagine from what you've said about her that she's a peach."

"She is, in my estimation."

"She must have been pretty well broke up over your sudden disappearance."

"I guess she has been. It's over two months since I was kidnapped. When Captain Barnacle returned from his trip I have no doubt but he reported me as having fallen overboard and drowned."

"The old villain. I hope you'll make him dance for his crime. You've got the money now to make matters sultry for him."

"I'll attend to him, don't you worry," replied Tom, in a decided tone.

Bob induced Tom to remain nearly a week in New York.

He showed him all the sights of the metropolis, and Tom was quite astonished at the wonders of the big city.

On a Sunday night they took the midnight train over the Shore Line for Boston, arriving at the capital of Massachusetts early on the following morning.

Shortly after breakfast they took a train over the Boston & Maine Railroad for the nearest point to Rockhaven.

A short branch line carried them to the town within eight miles by road of the village, and Tom hired a conveyance to take them over to the little seaport.

About a mile outside of Rockhaven the vehicle broke down.

"We'll have to hoof it the balance of the way," said Tom, as he surveyed the damage which the wagon had sustained. "There's a blacksmith shop a quarter of a mile down the road," he said to the driver. "Start your nag up and I'll have the repairs made at my expense."

Accordingly they resumed their way, all hands walking.

Tom and Bob went on alone after reaching the blacksmith's, where an arrangement was made for the repair of the wagon.

At last the boys came in sight of the sea, with the steeple of the little church showing above the break that the road made in the cliffs.

"I think," said Tom, "I'll go over to the cottage of Captain Gibbs first and give Fanny a glad surprise. I know

the back way down to the plateau from the top of the cliff. It is very seldom that any one uses that path, so they're not likely to notice our approach until we actually reach the cottage."

"I've no objection to anything you do," replied Bob, so the boys left the road and cut across through a straggling wood which ran to the edge of the cliffs.

They had traversed half this wood when they suddenly heard voices proceeding from behind a big rock.

Tom stopped.

"One of those voices belongs to Captain Barnacle, or I'm much mistaken," he said. "And the other sounds like Mr. Marsh, the man I worked for at the store, and who said he was my guardian. I'm going to make sure. I'd like to give the captain an unpleasant surprise."

He crept up to the corner of the stone, followed by Bob, looked cautiously around it, and saw at once that his suspicions were correct.

Captain Barnacle and Mr. Marsh were seated on an old tree trunk talking, and the storekeeper seemed to be considerably worked up over something.

"The boy is dead and food for the fishes long ago," said the captain. "So there ain't no reason for ye holdin' off no longer and refusin' to pay me that thousand dollars that ye promised me for kidnappin' him and seein' that he was put out of the way."

At those words, which thoroughly astonished the listening boy, Tom caught his breath with a gasp.

"But I want proof that Tom Gilbert wasn't picked up and saved by some passing vessel," whined Mr. Marsh. "If he should turn up again, even months from now, all my plans would be ruined."

"What plans have ye got ag'in him, anyway?" asked the skipper.

"That's my business," replied the storekeeper, sulkily.

"Ye said that before, Mister Marsh. Now I've made up my mind to know all the pertic-lars. If ye don't tell me I'll have ye arrested for passin' a counterfeit hundred dollar bill on me, which I've no doubt ye did knowin'ly, thinkin' I wouldn't know the diff'rence."

"You wouldn't dare."

"I wouldn't, eh? Ye don't know me, Mister Marsh. Tell me what scheme ye are workin' ag'in that dead boy, or I'll show ye up. I'll swear ye hired me to abduct and put him out of the way if ye don't."

"You'll only put a rope around your own neck."

"Don't ye believe it. I didn't harm the boy. I kin prove that he jumped overboard of his own accord. I kin send ye to jail all right, and I'll do it, too, if I have to go myself for a spell in order to do ye up."

"I'll tell you everything," groaned the storekeeper, and he did.

Tom, from his post of observation, learned all about the property in the West his father had left to him and which now that it had proved to be valuable had caused his guardian to adopt criminal methods to gain possession of it for himself.

So James Marsh, and not Captain Barnacle, was the enemy referred to by the old woman when she read his fortune at the store that fateful afternoon.

"So that's yer game, is it, Mister Marsh?" laughed the captain, sardonically. "Well, ye'll hand me over that thousand to-night, d'ye understand? And, further, ye'll pay me \$5,000 out of what ye get for the property, or ye'll get nothin' at all, as sure as my name is Cap'n Barnacle and I'm the skipper of the Mary Ellen."

"He'll do nothing of the kind, Captain Barnacle," said Tom, walking around the rock and presenting himself before the astonished gaze of the conspirators.

"Tom Gilbert!" gasped James Marsh, rising with a white and haggard face.

"Exactly—Tom Gilbert," replied the sturdy boy. "I've heard the whole of your conversation, and I now know why I was kidnapped two months ago from Rockhaven. And I've a witness, too. Bob, show yourself."

Whereupon Bob Lawrence put himself in evidence.

Captain Barnacle swore a round oath and, turning on his heel, made off.

"As for you, Mr. Marsh," said Tom, "I ought to have no mercy on you, but because you were an old friend of my father's I'll give you a chance. Go to the store. I will call there by and by for a full explanation. If you do the right thing by me I'll not prosecute you, and no one shall know from me that you are such a rascal as your own words have proved you to be. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, yes. I'll tell you everything," whined the storekeeper.

"I think I know most everything as it is. Now good-by till we meet again."

Then Tom and Bob left him, a badly demoralized man.

Captain Barnacle went to sea that afternoon on one of his regular trips.

As neither he, nor the Mary Ellen, nor any of the crew ever returned, it was taken for granted that the schooner foundered in the storm which struck the coast soon after.

It was with a beating heart that Tom Gilbert, followed by Bob, descended the cliff at the back of the Gibbs's cottage after leaving his guardian in the wood.

He thought to find Fanny at work in the kitchen, but she wasn't there.

He walked around to the front of the house expecting to see Captain Gibbs either pottering around his little garden or smoking on the small veranda.

The captain was not in sight.

"Where can they be?" the boy asked himself.

Then he stopped short as the voice he knew so well broke

in plaintive tones upon the air from a point on the edge of the cliff:

"Where are you wandering, Robin Adair?

On billowy ocean, or on the land—where?"

Tom advanced, as if drawn by the song, until he made out where the singer was sitting, with her hands in her lap and her face turned toward the ocean, sparkling in the morning sunshine.

As the last words floated off on the air, and the girl buried her face in her hands, Tom went softly up behind her and put his arms around her.

"I have returned, Fanny," he said, softly.

She uttered a scream and sprang up.

When she saw that it was indeed Tom who held her in his arms, she dropped her head on his shoulder with a sigh of joy.

Bob knew better than to follow Tom as he went toward his sweetheart, but took a seat on the veranda, where Tom in a short time introduced him to the girl of his heart.

Captain Gibbs returned from the village about this time, and he was mighty glad to see Tom again.

The boys took dinner at the cottage and then Tom carried Bob with him to the store, to be a witness to the settlement between him and James Marsh.

They remained a week at Rockhaven and were the lions of the place.

Then they went to Boston, where they collected their drafts on the bank, both of them leaving the bulk of their money on special deposit.

Tom and Bob went into business together, and are to-day rising young merchants of Boston.

Tom has a summer residence at Rockhaven in addition to the substantial home in Roxbury, and both are presided over by Fanny, now his beloved wife; but neither of them will ever forget the night he was cast adrift through the rascality of James Marsh.

THE END.

Read "PLAYING THE MARKET; OR, A KEEN BOY IN WALL STREET," which will be the next number (82) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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